

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This weekend is the second week of the “Bread of Life Discourse” in the Gospel of John. Today we hear that Jesus is “**the living bread that came down from heaven,**” and that “**whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world**” (John 6:51). Jesus’ Body is LIFE! What an amazing gift from our Lord! Do we receive our Lord knowing that the Eucharist is our Life? The Church teaches that the Eucharist is the **source and summit** of our Faith, of our lives.

The Eucharist is our source of life. From the Eucharist, we are given strength to endure and carry on the hard road of holiness (re-read the first reading about Elijah being strengthened by the bread of angels to walk forty days and forty nights!). From the Eucharist, we are able to carry on, to do the impossible. I think about the many Catholics who endured such trials just in the last century. There are so many stories of how the Eucharist sustained them in their trials, gave them strength to journey on, and kept them focused, beyond all odds, on doing *the good* for love of Jesus. Whenever I read about the imprisoned Vietnamese bishop who found such joy in secretly celebrating Mass in the palm of his hand with three drops of wine and a drop of water, and how he brought the Eucharist to others in the prison camp, I am reinvigorated to celebrate the Mass with joy and reverence.

When I read about the American Jesuit who spent twenty-three years in Soviet prisons, and how he was sustained by the Eucharist, I think, “My problems aren’t so insurmountable!” If I may quote at length:

For many Christians, I fear the notion of the Blessed Sacrament as the bread of life is somehow only a poetic or symbolic phrase used by Jesus in the Gospel. Yet what a source of sustenance it was to us then, how much it meant to us to have the Body and Blood of Christ as the food of our spiritual lives in this sacrament of love and joy. The experience was very real; you could feel its effect upon your mind and heart, upon your daily life. ...

The five long years in [solitary confinement] brought this home to me more forcefully than ever. I was deprived of that spiritual food and the reality of communion. I turned to God in prayer, made frequent acts of spiritual communion... but I literally hungered to be able to receive him once again. ... I could not have his sacramental presence. And the difference to me was very real. It was a hunger of the soul as real to me as the bodily hunger I constantly experienced throughout those years. ...

[In the Siberian prison work camps] I learned ... that it was possible to say Mass daily once again. ... [T]he Mass brought you closer to God than anyone might conceivably imagine. ...

I never let a day pass without saying Mass; it was my primary concern each new day. I would go to any length, suffer any inconvenience, run any risk to make the bread of life available to these men. (*He Leadeth Me* pp. 125, 126, 127)

And the suffering and risks he speaks about were very real! Oh, to live with Jesus truly being our source of LIFE – my source of life! – there would be nothing that would be “too hard”! (For some good reading in these areas, I suggest *He Leadeth Me*, by Fr. Walter J. Ciszek, SJ, *Testimony of Hope*, by Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, and *Kolbe: Saint of the Immaculata*, edited by Bro. Francis M. Kalvelage, FI.)

The Eucharist is the summit of life. Jesus – since He is God – is the goal of *everything*, and since the Eucharist **IS** Jesus, the Eucharist is the goal toward which we strive. The Eucharist is our deepest connection with Almighty God. Our lives are meant to seek after Him, union with Him, eternal life with Him. We are called to seek Him at center of every action, strive after Him with our whole hearts, to find his love working in our everyday-ness. The goal of our lives is to be with Him, in union with Him forever in Heaven. He *is* the summit toward which we climb!

May we truly have a greater appreciation for the Eucharist, this great gift of God’s presence in our midst.