



*Stewardship of The Gift of God
at St. John the Evangelist Parish*

Week 1: He is the Gift!

Dear Parishioners,

Many of us have attended the birthday party of a little child and seen the the same amusing scenerio. The child is handed a gift of tremendous value. He gleefully rips and tears, but no sooner does he open that gift, when he quickly pushes it aside to get to the next gift, and the next, and the next. The child seems more excited about opening gifts than really appreciating the beauty and value of the gift itself—almost forgetting the gift—and therefore, missing out on so much more!

In parish life, it is easy for us to do the same. So, this Fall, we hope to focus together on the splendor of the gift we have received as a parish—the gift of God dwelling among us in the person of Jesus Christ, the very gift that can fulfill all the deepest desires of the human heart. Pope John Paul II put it this way:

“The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift—however precious—among so many others, but as *the gift par excellence*, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work.”

—Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 11

As a stewardship parish, we often talk about sharing our gifts of time, talent and treasure for the good of all. But before we can fully appreciate our need to give, we must first contemplate *the astonishing gift* that we have received without merit: the gift of the Eucharist, the gift of the person of Christ dwelling among us, here and now, in this part of Silver Spring, Maryland.

Msgr Barry Knestout
& the Stewardship Committee

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“The Risen Christ is not a ghost, he is not merely a spirit, a thought, only an idea. He has remained incarnate.”

—Pope Benedict XVI (June 6, 2006)

St. John's Parish Formation in the Eucharist

Week 1: He is the Gift!



Christ remains ever present in the Church

The Church was fashioned by Christ, through the outpouring of his Spirit. But the Lord did not just found the Church, as one might found any society, and then abandon it to run on its own. He remains ever present in the Church. He continually creates and renews it with *the gift of himself*, of his own Body and Blood, and with the gift of the Holy Spirit, who united the faithful with Jesus and with each other.

In this way, a huge multitude of people of different ages, cultures, and places come to form one single Church. Why? Because they share one and the same Lord and one and the same Spirit.

It is easy to see, therefore, why the Eucharist is regarded as "the source and summit of the Christian life," that creates and sustains the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 11).

Christ and the Church are One Body

Where Christ is, there is the Church. And since the Eucharist is the Body of Christ, the Church cannot help but be where the Eucharist is. Let us recall once again the words of St. Paul: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17).

Among the Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine was one who stressed that the Eucharist is an efficacious sign or "sacrament" of the oneness of the Church. He almost went so far as to equate the very Body of Christ with the Church. When one receives the Eucharist, he said, one becomes the "body of Christ", which is the Church. Addressing the faithful of his church, the great bishop of Hippo made these clear and profound remarks:

"If you are the body, the members of Christ, here you find your mystery on the table of the Lord. You receive your mystery. You hear said to you (at Communion), "the Body of Christ", and you reply, "Amen". Be a true member of the body of Christ, then, so that your Amen may be true. At his table Christ the Lord consecrated the

mystery of our peace and our oneness. If you receive the mystery of oneness and then do not maintain the bond of peace, you do not really receive the mystery, but rather testimony against yourself."

The term 'mystery' is used often by Augustine. It means reality that has both an outer and an inner aspect. The outer aspect of the Eucharist is the bread and wine we see. The inner aspect is the Body and Blood of Jesus himself; it is also the Christian community, which is bound together by ties of peace and love by virtue of its communion with the Body and Blood of Christ. Herein lies the power and kernel of the peace and oneness that constitute the Church.

Through the Eucharist, Christ gives himself as constant gift to the Church

The celebration of the Eucharist, then, can be seen as a gathering or meeting of the Church. The whole Church comes together around the priest who breaks the bread. There we find the visible Church on earth, united with the pope and the bishops and represented by the ministers and the faithful. Even when the faithful are few in number, the whole mystery of the Church is a living reality in their midst. The Eucharist is always a communion with all believers.

There we also find the Church in heaven, the society of the saints. It is invoked and involved when we break the one bread and drink the one cup. What we have, in fact, is one single Church.

But this oneness is grounded completely in Christ, the head of the Church, who has risen from the dead. With his Spirit, he is present in the Eucharist; still ready to give himself as a gift, to sacrifice himself, to show his love, so that the Church may exist.



When we say that the Eucharist "makes" the Church, we mean that the Eucharist transmits the love Christ showed when he sacrificed himself. The Church was created by that love. Indeed it is that love as a living reality in the world.

--Excerpted from *Story of the Eucharist*
by Inos Cardinal Biffi

Next week:
Christ is truly present in the Eucharist