

Sunday Homily

Title More than Table Manners

Date: August 31, 2025

Sunday: 22nd Sunday of the Year (C cycle)

Scripture: Luke 14: 1, 7-14

By: Fr. Bob Schmitz

Text: An eighteenth-century philosopher called Voltaire wrote: “In the beginning, God created man in His own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since.” I have long known how we remake *God* according to our needs, how we shape *God* around our life-choices. That’s OK; God is infinite, which means God can take anything. But what if the real God is sad because our made-up *gods* keep the actual God from getting through?

What if—in a strange moment—God wanted to know if the authentic God is getting through? Popes John Paul and Benedict’s favorite theologian was Hans Urs von Balthasar. He says that the Mass is such a moment. At Mass, God seeks our approval for who God really is. You experience the moment. The communion distributor says Body or Blood of Christ. You respond Amen. Your Amen is your approval of the real God. Amen is *Yes* to the authentic God.

We need to explore who God really is. The best explanation of Mass is the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel. Jesus says: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. . . . Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.” The word *flesh* has been a stumbling block since the Lord spoke. We should not imagine a slab of red meat like those in a butcher’s display cabinet. No, *flesh* together with *blood* means Christ’s whole life, his complete self—everything from his time on earth, everything about his eternity as divine. The Catechism says the

Eucharist is: “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The words *flesh* and *blood* mean that Jesus gives his entire self to us.

By giving, God reveals who God is. We receive the GIFT to live in him as he lives in us. I doubt there is a better image of the Lord than the word GIFT; Jesus is self-giving GIFT given that we may share His whole life. We must know God as self-giving GIFT.

We can go deeper. The church teaches that the Eucharist is a re-presentation of the Lord’s crucifixion. The cross demonstrates the extent of the gift. Jesus pours forth the whole of his life to lift us to the fullness of life.

Here’s the question: Do we want to worship a Crucified God, a God who is self-giving GIFT? By exploring the Passion, the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar found that God asks us to abolish our made-up *gods* to endorse the authentic God. At the Last Supper, on the night before he died, Jesus demonstrated who he is by washing his disciples’ feet. Normally, slaves did that dirty work. Imagine: Jesus becoming a slave to his disciples. St. Peter refused to allow it because the gesture did not reflect his sort of *god*. But Jesus says, “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.” Jesus was demanding Peter’s approval of the God-who-gives-Himself. Peter came around and said YES.

John goes further with the Lord’s request for approval. In John’s Gospel, a small congregation gathered at the cross. John names most of the little congregation. He does not name the Lord’s mother, or the disciple Jesus loved most, however. Why leave these important people unnamed? John may have left them unnamed so we could imagine ourselves at the cross, ourselves as the mother of the Lord or the beloved disciple. At the cross, which is re-

presented here at Mass, we may affirm a Crucified God, a God of self-giving Love, along with Mary, the mother of the Lord and John, the beloved disciple.

Worshipping a Crucified God changes everything. In today's Gospel, Jesus is at dinner on a sabbath much like he is at Mass. The maître d' arranged the seating as if he valued guests from best to worst. If we share life with one who died to lift all people to the fullness of life, how can we degrade anyone as the worst? Our approval of the God-who-serves, instead, must demonstrate itself by our offering of ourselves to lift people up.

At that dinner, Jesus notes that the maître d' shamed his guests when he moved them from good seating to bad. But how can those who worship the One who gifts all humankind with salvation abuse any person? A gift of self affirms others.

And then, Jesus notes that many were excluded altogether, especially those most in need. Those who worship GIFT include everyone especially those in need.

Do we worship the Crucified God who gave everything out of love for us? If we remain in him and he in us, if we have life because of him, then his Gift of Self becomes our way of life. The GIFT received must become the GIFT we give. That's what our Amen means. Amen says we will give out of love as God is self-giving GIFT.