

## HOMILY

*The Solemnity of the Feast of the  
Body and the Blood of Christ  
and  
The Fifteenth Anniversary of the  
Dedication of Our New Parish Church*

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Memory is a tricky thing. Particularly as we get older. You may know the story about three people who were talking. The first said, “Sometimes I go to the refrigerator and forget what I need by the time I get there.” The second said, “When I go upstairs, I can’t remember whether I’m going for something or I’m on my way back down.” The third person said, “Thank God. Knock on wood. I don’t have that problem. Was that someone knocking on the door?”

Memory *is* a tricky thing. There are some things that we should never forget. One of these is the sacrifices that others have made on our behalf.

It was a spring morning in 1866, just after the Civil War that had devastated the South. A group of southerners did something quite extraordinary. They marched down the streets of what was left of their town to a cemetery. There, they decorated the graves of all the soldiers. ALL the soldiers—Union as well as Confederate! The mothers and the daughters and widows had buried their dead. Now they buried their hatred. The time for healing had come. It was the first Memorial Day.

There are those who remember when Memorial Day was called Decoration Day, and when the cemeteries were filled with people kneeling to plant a flower or place a garland or unfurl a flag or to say a prayer. Some still do. But most people cannot be bothered. It would take away from the beach, the backyard, the ball park.

At the National Cemetery on Long Island, one of the nation's largest, it has become necessary to advertise for volunteers to place flags on the graves of the veterans as the number of veteran volunteers has decreased. However, many of those who volunteer have no idea why they are there. One young man, a 12-year-old scout, was asked if he understood why the members of the Boy Scout troop were there placing flags on the graves. He quickly replied, "To get service hours."

Memorial Day is obviously not one of our major holidays. But we need to remember. We need to remember the debt we owe to others. You and I do not have what we have today by our efforts alone. There is no greater myth than that of the self-made man or woman. We owe an enormous debt from the first moment we come into this world. Some of that debt is owed to young men and women who shed their blood on battle fields. Many of them gave their lives because they truly believed that freedom is worth dying for. Let us pause here to have a moment of silence as we remember them.

We also remember the one who died to save us all—today we celebrate the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. We remember how the Lord Jesus loved us to his death. He not only gave us his body and blood on the cross where he bled and died, but under the forms of bread and wine, he gives his very self to us this day—his body and blood, his soul and divinity. It is by coming to union with him week after week, that we are transformed into the Body of Christ.

This weekend, we also celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the dedication of the very church that we are gathered in. How many of you were here fifteen years ago? How many of you remember the dedication?

Our church was build upon the Gospel of St. John. In the opening chapter of John's Gospel, John says the word of God made his dwelling with us. The actual Greek word—made his dwelling—literally means he pitched his tent. That's why the roof and ceiling have their peaks and valleys. Jesus has pitched his tent here in this neighborhood, in this community, where we dwell.

In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." That's why the church is basked in light. Jesus lights up our life; even at night, the cupola is lit up. As we come to union with Christ in this place, we are called to be light shining in the darkness. The highest point of our church, the cupola over the altar, reminds us to

look up to God whom we cannot see. The lower sides remind us to look closer. How can we love the God we don't see if we don't see and love God in one another?

Notice on the front of the altar table, we have a bronze cross with leaves. At the Last Supper, Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches." It is from this table that we receive Jesus. The bread and wine, the body and blood which we receive, makes us who we are. We need to receive Jesus to be who we are.

The cross depicts Good Friday from John's Gospel. Above the cross are the letters, in Latin: INRI

- + **"I"** is Latin for Jesus.
- + **"N"** is for Nazareth
- + **"BVM"** is for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus.
- + **"SJ"** is for St. John the Evangelist.
- + **"MM"** is for Mary Magdalene.

The corpus, or the body, on the cross was hand carved in Oberammergau and brought here by Father Donahoe, the pastor who built the former church that is now our chapel. The tabernacle, in which the Holy Eucharist is reserved, is placed between the wall of the church and the chapel. In John's Gospel, at Easter week when the disciples were inside the upper room, Jesus came into the room and stood with them even though the doors were locked. Jesus comes to meet us.

It was amazing when I opened the church this morning. The translucent glass around the tabernacle was just aglow. Morning has broken; the bright light of the Lord shines among us.

Thanks be to God and thanks be to you. You are truly a beautiful people. I consider it a real privilege to be with you as we walk the journey of life and faith together.