

- On Sunday we read St. Matthew's version of the Passion, and one of the things that stood out to me was the hardness of heart we find in the accusing Jews as Jesus stood before Pilate.
- When Pilate asks them, "What shall I do with Jesus called Christ?", they all said, "Let Him be crucified!" And so Pilate implores them, "Why, What evil has He done?" Yet, heedless and heartless, "They only shouted the louder, 'Let Him be crucified!'"
- Then, after Pilate washes his hands of the matter, proclaiming with palpable pusillanimity that he is innocent of this man's blood, the accusing Jews say something very provocative, and yet very prophetic.
- They say: "His blood be upon us and upon our children." In saying this, the Jews were cursing themselves and their children. Their frenzied passions had brutally blinded their intellects, so hellbent as they were on our Lord's destruction.
- In their jealousy and rage, these Jews, who had waited generation upon generation for the coming of the Messiah, couldn't see that they were putting to death the very One in Whom they hoped.
- Fortunately, our Lord doesn't hold grudges. And thus, He did not ratify the curse the Jews placed upon themselves by wishing Jesus' blood to be upon them and their children.
- Rather, in an astonishing fashion that is the hallmark of the divine, our Lord shed His blood, and He covered with it all those Jews who repented, making them His own children and procuring their salvation. What should have been a curse was redemptive.
- And His blood continues to be upon all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, who repent of our sins and choose to become God's children through the Sacraments. It's remarkable.
- Not only is His blood upon us as we receive forgiveness for our sins, but we also consume His body and blood in Holy Communion, being strengthened and ennobled by it so that we may live as other Christs out in the world.
- Receiving our Lord's body and blood in the Eucharist draws us into a nuptial intimacy with our Lord, as we, the Bride of Christ, take the divine Bridegroom into ourselves. This intimacy is a brief foretaste of the eternal union we hope to have with our Lord in Heaven.
- Truly, it's an awesome mystery that we partake of whenever we approach the communion rail. For it is not ordinary bread or even an especially symbolic bread that we receive here. It's really and truly our Lord's body, blood, soul, and divinity.
- When we receive our Lord in Holy Communion, we are proclaiming not only our love for Him, but as well our union with Him, and with everything that His Church teaches and proclaims to be true.
- So, while there is certainly a private devotional aspect to our reception of Holy Communion, coming to the altar rail is also a public declaration on our part that we are in union with our Lord and with His one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church.
- Therefore, as your pastor, I beg you: do not approach this altar rail if you have any sense at all that you have unconfessed mortal sin. And do not come to this altar rail if you do not believe or live in accordance with what the Church teaches.
- For to do so is to be another Judas, who professed to be our Lord's disciple, but who very wickedly and hypocritically betrayed our Lord in the end.
- Moreover, when you do receive Holy Communion, do so with great reverence and love, with a true realization of Who it is that is that you are receiving. Again, this is no ordinary bread. It is God Himself. Therefore, He's not to be treated as any other type of food.
- What's most important about receiving Holy Communion is that we have a humble and loving disposition before our Lord: that we are desirous of His mercy, that we are desirous of holiness, and that we are desirous of living with Him forever in Heaven.

- Of course, there's more to tonight's Mass than our grateful celebration of the Eucharist. In the richness of this liturgy, we honor and celebrate as well the means by which the Eucharist comes to us: the sacred priesthood of Jesus Christ.
- These two gifts are inextricably linked and cannot exist without each other. There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood, and there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist relies on the priesthood for its very existence. It is the priest who confects the Eucharist. Without a priest saying the words of consecration that St. Paul speaks of in the second reading, those words remain precisely that: just words.
- Nothing, nothing at all, can substitute the power of a priest saying those words.
- But priests are also dependent on the Eucharist. It is the Eucharist that gives the priest his identity. In fact, the Eucharist is the primary reason why priests are ordained.
- The Eucharist and the priesthood go together; it's why our hands are chrismated.
- As we receive and honor these twin gifts of the priesthood and the Eucharist, we must give profound thanks to our Lord.
- We show our gratitude first by our willingness to follow our Lord into the Garden tonight so that we might stay and pray with Him. As such, at the end of this Mass we will have a Eucharistic Procession and Adoration until midnight.
- Yet the gratitude demanded of us for such awesome gifts cannot be satisfied by prayer alone. Indeed, our gratitude to Christ is best shown through humble imitation of Him.
- Like our Lord, we also must be willing to humble ourselves before others and serve them. We must be willing to give of ourselves fully through charitable words and actions, most especially through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.
- Love for God and love for neighbor are, of necessity, bound up together. To be perfectly frank, we cannot say that we love God truly, if we do not love our neighbor as ourself.
- Lastly, we show our thanks to our Lord by the way we treat our priests, recognizing that by the grace of Holy Orders, priests stand in Christ's place here on earth.
- I make this last point with a great deal of trepidation, because although by grace I am a priest of Jesus Christ, I am a weak and sinful man. I sincerely ask for your forgiveness for the times that I have failed to be a priest like Jesus Christ.
- But even though priests are weak and sinful, we must treat them with a certain respect and reverence because they stand in the person of Christ. Indeed, because of the great dignity priests possess, we must treat priests as we would treat Jesus Himself.
- Truly, I've found that most of you here at St. Ann's do just that, and I'm so very grateful for the respect, affection, and love you show me despite my faults and failings.
- But if I may be so bold as to ask something of you, I ask that you pray for Fr. Jones and me, and for all priests. Pray that we may be truly holy, truly Christ-like in every way, so that we can be proper pastors and shepherds of souls.
- It can be a frightening thing to stand at the altar and call down our Lord from Heaven, holding Him, Who is our Creator, in our hands. It's an awesome responsibility to stand in His place and bless, heal, counsel, teach, and forgive sins. So, we need your prayers.
- Pray that we may be always fervent, chaste, prudent, and charitable. Pray that we have the courage to live our vocations with reverence and integrity. Pray most of all that we be effective in helping you on the path to salvation.
- Looking back over the last 16 years that I've been at St. Ann's, I am so very grateful for your prayers, support, and love. So, thank you.
- May God bless and keep you all this Holy Thursday. May Christ's blood be upon us, may His blood cleanse us of our sins, and may His blood be our peace and our consolation.