

- While we are celebrating today the 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, today, August 11<sup>th</sup>, is also the feast of St. Clare of Assisi.
- You'll notice that our beautiful statue of St. Clare – here on my right – depicts this heroic virgin holding a monstrance with our Eucharistic Lord. This is to commemorate a most daring moment in the life of this extraordinary woman.
- In September 1240 a band of Saracen soldiers, in the employ of Emperor Frederick II of Sweden, laid siege to the picturesque town of Assisi in the Umbrian mountains of Italy.
- Not content to pillage only the town, the Saracens broke into the cloister of San Damiano, where St. Clare of Assisi lived with her newly formed community of women religious, whom we now know as the Poor Clares.
- Terrified at the invasion of the Saracen soldiers, the sisters cried for help to St. Clare, who at the time was deathly ill. Despite her illness and the natural fear that anyone would feel in such a situation, St. Clare summoned her daughters to courage and faith in the Lord.
- With a look of steely resolve and unwavering trust in our Lord's goodness, she took up the monstrance with the Eucharist inside and met the Saracens at the wall of the cloister, all the while praying to our Lord for deliverance.
- And their deliverance was granted. Though merely a defenseless and sickly woman, at the sight of her holding the Eucharist, those brutish men turned away and fled.
- Such is the power of the Eucharist.
- Again this Sunday, we continue with the *Bread of Life Discourse* in John's Gospel.
- Today we hear Jesus state authoritatively: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."
- There's not a lot of ambiguity here, folks. The Eucharist is no ordinary bread. It is really and truly the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ.
- And in this story from the life of St. Clare, along with so many stories of Eucharistic miracles from the rich history of the Church, we are given proof of the truth of the Eucharist: that it is *not* simply bread, but God Himself.
- Years ago, when I was studying Catholicism and trying to come to understand it, I struggled to understand why God would humble Himself to become bread. The thought of it sounded not only preposterous, but even reckless on God's part.
- While I didn't doubt God's power to become bread if He so wanted, I couldn't understand why the sovereign Lord of the universe would allow Himself to become something not only so very common, but something that could be so easily mishandled and abused?
- I couldn't understand why God would risk being so vulnerable before sinful man.
- The reason why I couldn't comprehend such a mystery was because I didn't know God well enough. I didn't know the depths of God's love for sinful man. I didn't understand just how much God wanted to reconcile sinful man to Himself.
- Yet, in time and by God's grace, the surety that I now have about the Eucharist was given to me. And now, in the Eucharist I see not an inscrutable mystery, but only pure love.
- Out of His incomprehensible love for man, God is willing to humble Himself to become common bread. He's willing to risk being mishandled and abused and treated without proper attention, as common things so commonly are.

- Of course, this is nothing new for God, for did He not take the same type of risk in becoming man? And was not our Lord unjustly abused and maltreated in His manhood?
- Love empowers us to take risks. Love makes us willing to suffer for those whom we love.
- Our Lord took the risk of becoming a man so that He could reconcile sinners to Himself. And He takes the risk of becoming the Eucharist so that we might be strengthened to live as His true disciples and share more fully in His love.
- And if we are to be true disciples of our Lord, then we must learn to love our Lord above all else and our neighbors as ourselves, for this is His greatest commandment to us.
- Of course, this means that we must love even those whom we find difficult and disagreeable, which can often require a great deal of stamina and self-control. Each of us must learn to control our passions and our emotions to love some of the people God has placed in our lives.
- As St. Paul tells us in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading today: *All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ. So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.*
- Furthermore, cultivating an authentic charity requires doing what we know to be the right thing for others, even when it's difficult. Like our Lord, we must risk being hurt and mistreated by others in order to love in spirit and in truth.
- In other words, we all must be like the Good Samaritan of Luke's Gospel, ever ready and willing to care for the needs of others, even when it costs us something. We must be willing to be a sacrificial offering for the sake of others, just as Christ was.
- Think of the words of St. John in his first epistle:

*The way we came to know love was that [Christ] laid down His life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech, but in deed and truth.*

- John is teaching us here that love is not a sentimental feeling, but an action. Love is something we must do, not simply something we feel. Moreover, we cannot say we love God unless we show love to our fellow man.
- Generally speaking, we love others only to the extent that we love God. If we don't love others well, then it means that we don't love God well.
- Yet, when we learn to love God well, which we do by obeying Him, worshipping Him, and spending time with Him in prayer, He loves us even more truly and more ardently in return, transforming us and empowering us to take the risk to love others as we should.
- And His greatest help in strengthening us this way is the Eucharist. When we receive the Eucharist worthily and well, in a state of grace and with a desire for union with our Lord, then slowly but surely God's presence in the Eucharist makes us more like Himself.
- Such is the power of the Eucharist.
- Brothers and sisters, we are given an incomprehensible gift in Holy Communion, a gift that strengthens us to love as God loves. May we never treat It with the casualness of a common thing, but with utmost reverence. And may we trust in Its power to make us more like Christ.
- St. Clare of Assisi, pray for us.