

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

8th September 2019

We welcome families and friends who have come here today on the occasion of their children's First Holy Communion. Some have travelled great distances – some grandparents have even come from overseas – Italy. I encourage the parents to ponder their own First Holy Communion today as they observe their children receiving this great Sacrament for the very first time. You parents, in particular mothers, have fed your children's bodies – nourished them – and thus watched them grow over time. Today, Mother Church, God's spiritual family, will nourish their souls. Why does God want to feed our souls? Apart from sustaining our souls, we need His strength to help us on our way. His divine Presence within assists us to follow him, especially when trials and tribulations come. And come they must, for here is not there, earth is not heaven: for are we not promised Paradise? Even the Canadian Psychologist, Jordan Peterson, who does not profess any religion, admits in his **12 Rules of Life**, that suffering is a part of life.

Today's Gospel is unique to us Christians because it bears the hallmark of the cross. Jesus said: Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. The cross and being a Christian go together. In that statement there are enshrined two rules: 1. Carry his cross: the cross allotted to us by divine Providence is our cross not the one we construe by bad choices; and we are to carry it, not drag it or lean on it or complain about it; 2. Come after Him for we do not go alone and do not follow others, the media or entertainment, who cannot help us, for only Jesus can give us the grace to keep on going. For did He not teach us to say in the only prayer crafted in Heaven for us on Earth: *Give us this day our daily bread*. Today is *that* day when your children will receive not bread but the sacred Host into their souls. Some may think, sure but is not the 'bread' a symbol of Jesus? The answer is no. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is not a symbol but it is a sign.

What's the difference between a symbol and a sign? It is true that in Christianity, there are symbols and signs everywhere. The triangle is a symbol of the Trinity. When you walked in here there is a ceramic dove on the floor that is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. But these are only symbols and not signs. A symbol takes the place of something unseen or not present - it fills a void. On the other hand, a sign is always more, it tells you something – it points the way, like the Mutsch St sign on Prune St to tell you where to find the Holy Spirit school office. The red light at the intersection is a sign to stop. Smoke is a sign of fire and so on. Of all the signs that exist, natural and artificial, only seven signs have been given to us by God and these holy signs just don't tell us something they also *cause* something. These seven signs are the Sacraments. A Sacrament by definition is an external sign that causes what it signifies – that is, it causes God's invisible grace to enter into our souls. You see, grace remains unseen, so we need a physical sign that tells us it is happening e.g. water in baptism – washes the soul of sin, oil in anointing - heals the soul and sometimes body. Each Sacrament involves form and matter, something said and something done. At the offertory the gifts of natural bread and wine are brought to the altar and during the words of consecration, the Holy Spirit changes the substance of these gifts into the real Presence of Jesus' Body and Blood. This divine reality we cannot see but it happens just like our WIFI or Bluetooth which we also cannot see but does happen. For that reason we don't receive the 'bread' at Communion time but the 'host' or 'consecrated Bread' for the Presence of God lies within. This is a great Sacrament to make us holy – hence the words holy communion for it is to make us holy. Thus for that reason we need to be well prepared to receive this sacred Gift.

Three Conditions for Holy Communion:

1. Be a baptized Catholic who believes; anyone can become a Catholic to receive this Sacrament.
2. Be free of mortal/serious sin (missing Mass is a mortal sin); so Confession beforehand.
3. Be fasting for 1 hour beforehand: to prepare the soul via the body.

We also rejoice on this occasion, the 8th of September, for it is the feastday of the birthday of Mary, the Mother of God. So we ask her to watch over and bless your children and families. In return, we express our devotion to her who always teaches us to love Jesus more and more. We ask her to help us to become faithful to the practice of daily prayer and Sunday Mass. God only asks of us one hour out of the 168 hours in the week and gives us so much more in return. So don't lose the good habit of coming to Mass each week. God is the greatest Giver of all that we need and provides for us, as we said in the psalm: In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.