

## **"Eucharistic Communion and Human Solidarity"**

Homily of June 2, 2002

by Fr. Gerry Murphy

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Last summer while at home in Ireland preparing for my ordination to the priesthood, I assisted one morning as a deacon at an end of school year mass in one of the local high schools in my hometown. One very special guest at this mass was Sr. Breige Mc Kenna. Now for those of you who have not heard of Sr. Briege, she is an Irish Poor Clare sister who is known all over the world for her ministry of healing. During the mass she very graciously spoke to us about her life, her faith and her ministry. I was particularly struck by an experience she shared with us about a trip she had made to Mexico the previous summer.

There, in a remote and very poor part of that country she was asked one day to minister to a huge gathering of people at an outdoor mass. Seeing the large crowd and their obvious poverty, she felt somewhat overwhelmed, and wondered what 'Good News' she had to offer them. And then, to compound matters, just before the mass got underway, a young Mexican woman approached Sr. Briege carrying what looked like a tattered rolled-up shawl. This she placed in Sr. Briege's arms, with a pleading look in her eyes. When Briege unraveled the shawl she could hardly believe what she saw: a little baby boy, badly burnt and covered in sores, but screeching and wriggling and still very much alive. The baby had apparently been abandoned and left to die in a smoldering ash heap.

Not knowing what to do, and being miles from any hospital or clinic, Sr. Briege simply told the young woman to come to her at the end of mass. In the meantime the young woman put the badly burnt baby in a little basket and placed him under the altar.

When the mass was over Sr. Briege suddenly remembered the baby and went to retrieve him from under the altar, but he was no longer there. Eventually she tracked down the young woman who had come to her and found the child with her, but something incredible and amazing had happened: the baby's badly burnt and charred skin had been miraculously restored and now glowed with vigorous new health. Somewhat taken aback at what she saw, Sr. Briege found herself foolishly asking the young woman: 'What happened the baby?' To which the young Mexican woman replied 'Why do you ask me what happened the baby? Don't you know that Jesus was here just a moment ago!'

Only then did the full impact and mystery of what had just taken place at the mass,

begin to dawn on Sr. Briege. And she described it in this way: 'At every mass during the eucharistic prayer the priest extends his hands over the gifts of bread and wine and a prayer of invocation is said, calling on the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. When this prayer of invocation was said at my mass in Mexico, not only were the bread and wine transformed into Christ's body and blood, but the little badly burnt baby, hidden under the altar, was, at that precise moment, also miraculously transformed and given new life and health.'

I believe this story beautifully and tenderly illustrates for us the meaning of the feast we celebrate today - the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. Under the appearance of bread and wine, the risen Jesus is truly, substantially and permanently present. His presence is a deep and beautiful gift that spiritually and physically nourishes us, heals us and makes us whole. In receiving Jesus in this special way, we enter into a deep communion with the whole person of Jesus, so that individually and as a community we may be more and more transformed into the living memorial of Jesus that we are called to be in our world. Every sacramental communion with Jesus empowers us to live and love as Jesus lived and loved on earth. And how did Jesus live and love while he was physically here on earth?

Well, knowing as he knew so well, the wounds and hungers of the human heart, Jesus lived and loved in complete solidarity with us. He came among us as one of us to teach us, heal us and to set us free. And he continues to live on in solidarity and communion with us through the precious gift of eucharistic communion, and through the fruit it is intended to bear - the many ways in which we as a human family are called to live in communion and solidarity with one another.

In a world where 60% of the population live on less than \$2 per day, and where children are living and dying on the streets, many wounds and hungers of the human heart inflicted by war, greed and injustice still cry out for our compassionate response. A little baby boy cried out in pain at a mass in Mexico. God heard him, touched him and healed him. May the communion with the person of Jesus we experience at this mass move us to live more deeply in solidarity with one another.