

Homily by Adam Cardinal Maida
CHRISM MASS
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
APRIL 5, 2007

My brother Bishops and Priests, Deacons and Religious, and Lay Faithful of the Archdiocese:

Our annual Chrism Mass brings us together from every corner of the Archdiocese; we gather in this, our Mother Church, to bless the Oil of the Sick and the Oil of the Catechumens, and to consecrate the Sacred Chrism. The very act of our gathering together is, of itself, a significant point of departure for homiletic reflection. Moved by the Spirit of God, we come together because we long for an experience of communion—with God and each other. Our very presence here proclaims a deep desire to share our faith with the whole Church—not only that of our own Archdiocese, but also with Pope Benedict XVI and the Church Universal. Our presence here proclaims anew our firm conviction that our salvation in Christ is a corporate gift, a communion of life. The Triduum we are about to celebrate calls us to an ever-deeper appreciation of the way Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection makes us one, holy, priestly people.

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation on the Holy Eucharist, Sacramentum Caritatis, Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes the inseparable bond of Christ and His Body, the Church. He reminds us that we use the same words—Corpus Christi—to designate Christ's body born of Mary, his Eucharistic body and His ecclesial body. As he explains in his own words: *"The oneness and indivisibility of the Eucharistic body of the Lord implies the oneness of his mystical body, which is the one and indivisible Church. From the Eucharistic centre arises the necessary openness of every celebrating community, of every particular Church. By allowing itself to be drawn into the open arms of the Lord, it achieves insertion into His one and undivided body."*

Everything about today's celebration proclaims our unity in Christ. Our Lenten journey has challenged us to set aside our personal preferences and agendas in favor of the gifts and needs of the wider Church. Every aspect of the sacred Triduum invites us to contemplate the "wholeness" of Christ's Risen Body, the "Catholicity" of our Church.

In today's culture, we tend to think of things as discreet or separate entities. With laser technology, we can quickly dissect and analyze each component part. The breadth and depth of knowledge in every area of science is so overwhelming that we necessarily focus on details and often lose sight of the whole picture. Put another way, we get "parochial," preoccupied with our own specific parish or school, our specific agenda, and often cannot see or hear the voices of others and their experiences, especially when they think differently than ourselves or come from a different ethnic, racial, educational, or economic experience.

In some ways, we could say the reality of sin in our lives most often involves a choice for immediate solutions rather than living with the mystery and confusion of the larger whole. This tendency is true on an individual level as each of us struggle with the rhythm of sin and grace in our daily choices. It is also true on the wider social level as we close our minds and hearts to the Lord's presence in people different than ourselves.

In the days of Isaiah, and at the time of Jesus, one of the challenges people of faith was the choice for hospitality for the stranger. As we consider the many social issues of our time, clearly, welcoming the stranger is one of the ways the Gospel of Life is truly countercultural. At a time when many want to build a fence to keep out would-be illegal migrants, we are challenged to consider the teaching of Jesus in today's Gospel and His example of solidarity with all those who were marginalized or forgotten. Sadly, it happens that aggression, even violence, is chosen instead of opening our hearts in hospitality.

In his beautiful encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, makes it clear that our communion with Christ is necessarily communion with His whole Body. I quote: *"Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom He gives Himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to Him only in union with all those who have become or who will become His own. Communion draws me out of myself towards Him and thus also toward unity with all Christians"* (Article 14).

In a special way, those of us blessed with the gift of priestly ordination are called to carry within our hearts a special prayerful concern for the well-being of the whole Church throughout the world. As the Council Fathers of Vatican II put it, *"The spiritual gift which priests received at their ordination prepares them not for any limited and narrow mission, but for the widest scope of the universal mission of salvation... The priesthood of Christ, which all priests truly share, is necessarily intended for all peoples and all times. It is bound by no limits of blood, nationality, or time, a fact already mysteriously prefigured in the person of Melchisedech"* (PO 10). On this day, as

we renew our priestly commitment to service and celibacy, let us pledge to the Lord and His people to live always according to the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who gave His life for the unity of the whole flock.

In a special way, here in the Archdiocese, at this time, I ask you, my brother priests, to be examples of gracious hospitality and concern for the greater common good of the Archdiocese by continued support of the process of implementing vicariate pastoral planning. I thank you for the generosity you have always shown in your willingness to accept often difficult assignments because of the needs of the whole Archdiocese. Your example of obedience is a powerful witness to the whole Church and gives encouragement to all of us in our daily struggles to choose the greater good rather than the comfort of the familiar or immediate.

As I conclude today's homily, I would like to invite all of us to reflect on the way we need to stretch beyond our immediate concerns and perspectives, opening our minds and hearts to think and act according to the example of the Risen Christ—with arms open to embrace everyone and everything. The questions are clear enough: Am I truly Eucharistic, grateful for all that has been given and not given? Am I willing to be broken that others might be nourished? Do I strive for the common good and the well-being of the whole Church?

Finally, I would like to offer an image: the mosaic of the multiplication of loaves and fishes on the floor at Tagba in the Holy Land, the place where this miracle is traditionally commemorated. A curious detail is the fact the mosaic does not depict five loaves one might expect, but instead, only four loaves. The reason? Because the fifth loaf is the Eucharistic bread on the altar. We are constantly invited to look beyond what we see and consider the larger picture, to realize the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes is happening here and now at this altar on this Holy Thursday. As Christ's faithful, in union with the whole Church, may we truly be one body and one spirit in the Risen Lord Jesus. Amen.