

*This is the text of Father Fraser's homily at Solemn Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at St Mary Parish, Riverside, Illinois during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2010.*

## **This is the Lamb of God...**

On New Year's Day afternoon I attended a reception downtown on Michigan Avenue. Of the several thousand people present, I was the only one wearing clerical attire. In one crowded room I was carefully eyeing a buffet table loaded with things that I am not supposed to eat when a man – very stylishly dressed in slacks, jacket, and tie – walked up and introduced himself to me as being a priest.

As you could probably guess, given his sartorial snazziness, he was a Jesuit...from the Wisconsin Province who is now teaching in a west coast university. Not surprisingly we have a Jesuit friend in common, one who spent most of his ministry as a theologian at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and that led to talk about this priest's own years of research and writing in Rome and of course some good natured clergy gossip.

This brief encounter on New Year's Day reminded me once again what a small world church circles are. One of the pleasant things that has happened between Anglicans and Roman Catholics since the Second Vatican Council is the sense of friendship that has grown among many of the clergy.

I found myself reflecting on this New Year's Day encounter, and it was clear to me once again that there was more to it than just social pleasantries. There is real theological significance to the relationships between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The now forty year on-going official dialogue conducted by the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission has led to agreed statements on almost all aspects of the Christian Faith, including the nature of Sacred Scripture, all seven Sacraments, Salvation, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the doctrine of the Church.

There is, it is true, a bitter liberal-conservative culture war going on right now in Anglicanism just as tragically there is within Roman Catholicism (we, for better or for worse, just do it publicly). But like Eastern Orthodoxy, the only strictly theological matter still to be resolved between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism is the nature of the authority of the Bishop of Rome in the Universal Church. (The value of his office is not in dispute, just the manner in which his authority is to be exercised.)

Obviously, for Anglicans and Roman Catholics to be in Full Communion – just as for Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics to be in Full Communion – there must also be agreement on the ministry of the Papacy. Nevertheless, even though Full Communion has not yet been achieved, since the Second Vatican Council it has become clear just how much oneness we already have, not just socially (as pleasant as that can be) but also in and indeed because of how very much we share in both doctrine and practice.

This evening we are focusing on Sacred Scripture and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and therefore it is very appropriate that we celebrate together the Liturgy of the Word and Solemn Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Because Anglicans and Roman Catholics believe exactly the same thing about Sacred Scripture and the Most Holy Eucharist, this celebration gives us a sense of oneness.

However, this oneness goes far beyond a nice ecumenical feeling during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The fact is that the Sacrament of the Eucharist is all about oneness. It brings together and holds together all of the Christian faith and all who are made a part of it through Holy Baptism.

- The Eucharist makes it possible for us to be one with the Incarnation of Jesus Christ because the bread and wine become His living, true body and blood, soul and divinity.
- The Eucharist makes it possible for us to be one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit because the Holy Trinity is one substance with God the Son present under the appearances of bread and wine.
- The Eucharist makes it possible for us to be one with the glorious and blessed Ever-Virgin Mary, because that Eucharistic body is exactly the same flesh that the Second Person of the Trinity received from his holy Mother.
- The Eucharist makes it possible for us to be one with the whole Paschal Mystery – the events of the Sacred Triduum – exactly as the twelve disciples were, because in this wondrous Sacrament Our Lord's suffering, saving sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection become actually present and their benefits become available to each of us.
- The Eucharist makes it possible for us to be one with the whole Church that has gone before us because, as Pope Paul VI pointed out, in the Eucharist not only does Jesus Christ become truly and really present under the appearances of bread and wine but He brings with Him the whole company of the Church Penitent/Expectant and the Church Triumphant.

All of that is what is here with us and among us in that monstrance on the Altar.

When we talk about oneness during this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we are certainly talking about more than just the relationship between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. We include in our prayers and hopes all those who have validly received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

However, one thing that the specific focus on *our* relationship makes possible – which is not yet possible with the ecclesial bodies which came out of the Protestant Reformation – is that we have a growing oneness not in spite of our understanding of Sacred Scripture, the seven Sacraments, Salvation, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the doctrine of the Church, but indeed because of it.

May we all – like the disciples at Emmaus on that first Easter Day – come to know Our Lord Jesus Christ in the breaking of the bread because this Bread truly is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and blessed are those who are called to His Supper.