

A UNIVERSE OF GRATITUDE

Keynote at Catholic Charities Priest Appreciation Dinner Crowne Plaza, Lake Placid, Nov. 8, 2009.

The heavens proclaim the glory of God
And the firmament shows forth the work of his hands.
Day unto day takes up the story
And night unto night makes known the message.

- A. These words of Psalm 19 were written about 2500 years ago. They speak about the glory, the power of God being literally shouted, proclaimed by the sun, the moon and the stars; and by the beauty of this blue-green earth teeming with life. And this story is told every day, every night, year after year, century after century from the beginning of creation to its final fulfillment.
- B. The heavens – in process of death and new creation beginning with the unimaginable explosion 13.5 billion years ago of a tiny incredibly dense particle. Stars, galaxies, gravity, producing the elements, new combinations of elements, the formation of planets around our sun. Earth.
- C. Always the same rhythm: the single cell merges with others, dies, as it were to produce new and complex organisms. Trillions combine to become a unique human being - in whom there is, for the first time, the emergence of something beyond the physical – thought, reflection, love.
- D. And to what purpose all this struggle? In the “fullness of time” there was born Jesus of Nazareth who entered fully into the divine creation begun by God billions of years before. The message proclaimed by the heavens was lovingly delivered in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, brother and savior of humankind. All previous history led to this culminating event and all subsequent history flows from it.

- E. The celebration of this is for us the “summit and source” of our lives, of our faith. The Holy Eucharist means “thanksgiving.” The life of a priest is, therefore, in a very special way, *immersed in gratitude*.
- F. In our Ordination ritual, the bishop hands us a chalice and paten and says: “Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to Him. Know what you are doing, and become the mystery you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord’s Cross.” May we remember these words and let them inspire us again and again with the Spirit of God’s transforming Love released in us by the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- G. For we are called to become a living Eucharist each time that we repeat the words of our Master: ***This is my body which will be given up for you; this is the cup of my blood. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven.***
- H. We, made strong in our weakness by Christ with us, are to live Eucharistic lives: in the words of St. Augustine: “Body broken and blood poured out” in service to Christ in his People, the Church. As the author of Hebrews tells us, “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,” so, like Christ, we too are one with the human family. “So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.” (Heb. 4:15)

Conclusion: Responding to this call on every level of our lives, *we priests are gratitude incarnate*. With Christ and the heavens “we proclaim the glory of God and show fourth the work of His hands. Every day we take up the story and every night makes known the message.”

Thanks be to God!