I

In five days, we will have a eucharistic Congress examining the Eucharist scripturally, which is essential to do at this time. People have different kinds of presence. We have a physical presence, like when we're talking to someone, but if they're not listening, we need their personal presence. A real presence is when it is both physical and personal. As children grow up, they cast things off from their parents. Whether this is right or wrong, does not matter, but it's done. The two most ancient Christian churches, Catholic and Orthodox both hold without any hesitation or equivalence the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist

 Fr. Tommy Lane

We all want to meet Jesus. We want to have a closer friendship with Jesus. We want to have more of Jesus in our lives. We have come to the right place: the Eucharist. The best place to meet Jesus is in the Eucharist. If you want to be close Jesus, he tells us how in the Gospel today:

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood *remains in me and I in him*. (John 6:56)

Our most intimate moment with Jesus is when we receive Jesus in Holy Communion. We receive Jesus into our very bodies. We could not be closer with Jesus. We are one.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood *remains in me and I in him*. (John 6:56)

It reminds me of what we read in Genesis about man and woman becoming one in marriage: when we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, we are no longer two but one, and we and Jesus are intimately united.

Jesus gave himself for you on Calvary and gives himself for you again in Holy Communion. In today’s Gospel we heard Jesus say,

the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

This is really the same as what Jesus will say later during the Last Supper,

This is my body, which will be given for you (Luke 22:19).

In today’s passage Jesus says,

the bread that I will give **is** my flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

and during the Last Supper Jesus will say,

This **is** my body, which will be given for you (Luke 22:19).

Jesus gave up his body for you on Calvary and gives up his body for you in every Mass so that you may receive him in Holy Communion. It is the one sacrifice on Calvary extended through time to us at Mass. Some misunderstand and think Catholics say Jesus is sacrificed again during every Mass. No, it is the one sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary which is extended through time to us in every Mass and so truly Jesus can say to you,

the bread that I will give **is** my flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51)
This **is** my body, which will be given for you (Luke 22:19).

so you and Jesus can enjoy intimacy together.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. (John 6:56)

In the Gospel passage today, Jesus is really explaining what takes place during the Last Supper and every Mass. It is another take on the Last Supper, looking at the Last Supper from another angle so that we get a fuller understanding.

But are we going too far in saying that bread really becomes the Body of Jesus? Did Jesus intend us to understand that he was speaking only in symbols and metaphors and that we should not take him literally? Or did Jesus really intend us to understand that bread becomes the Body of Jesus and wine becomes the Blood of Jesus, that transubstantiation takes place during the consecration at Mass?

* Those who were listening to Jesus knew he was not talking in symbols; they started arguing afterwards about what he had just said, “How can this man give us (his) flesh to eat?” (John 6:52) It was clear to them that Jesus was talking about his flesh as bread, and it would become clear for his listeners later that he really did mean that the bread of the Eucharist becomes his flesh. Why was there no room for confusion?
* We have no idea how horrifying it would have been for Jesus’ Jewish listeners to hear him talking of consuming blood. Many times the Old Testament forbade consuming blood (Lev 3:17; 7:26; 19:26) because life was in the blood (Lev 17:14). If someone consumed blood, he was to be excommunicated from the Jewish people (Lev 17:10,14). For Jesus’ listeners to hear him talking of consuming blood, it would have been so horrifying that they could not make the mistake of thinking that he was talking only in symbols. Jesus is leading his listeners from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, the supreme dwelling place of God on earth was in the temple in Jerusalem, but in the New Covenant God is with us in Jesus anytime we celebrate the Eucharist and Jesus gives himself to us in the bread and wine changed into his Body and Blood during Mass. In the Old Covenant, God fed his people with manna when they were wandering in the desert as we heard in our first reading (Deut 8), but in the New Covenant Jesus feeds us with his own Body and Blood through his Real Presence in the Eucharist.
* When we read what Jesus said in the original language of the Gospel, Greek, we see that what Jesus said was very strong. In the original language, Jesus didn’t just say “eat my flesh” (φαγειν) but something much stronger like “chew on my flesh” or “gnaw on my flesh” or “crunch my flesh with your teeth.” (τρώγειν) So in the original language of the Gospel, the last line of today’s passage reads something like this: your ancestors ate (ἒφαγον the bread that came down from heaven and died but whoever gnaws and crunches (τρώγειν) on this bread will live forever. Reading the Gospel in its original language leaves no room for confusion, Jesus really did intend us to understand that the bread of the Eucharist is his flesh. Jesus really is present in the Eucharist; the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Jesus.

Because our faith is weak, from time to time God sends us miracles to remind us that the Eucharist really is food and drink for our souls. In the history of the Church, a small number of people were given the grace to survive only on the Eucharist, eating no food except the Eucharist. Saint Mary of Egypt lived in the times of the Church fathers and they did not record how an years but that it was once a year. But for more contemporary examples: Blessed Alexandrina of Portugal lived on the Eucharist for the last thirteen years of her life. Marthe Robin in southeastern France did not consume anything except the Eucharist from 1928 until her death in 1981. (*Marthe Robin: The Cross and the Joy*) There are some others who also received this grace.

We all want to meet Jesus. We want to have a closer friendship with Jesus. We want to have more of Jesus in our lives. We have come to the right place: the Eucharist. The best place to meet Jesus is in the Eucharist. Each time before we receive Jesus in the Eucharist we want to be as pure as possible. If you want to be close with Jesus he tells us how:

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. (John 6:56)

2

On the platform of a railroad station there was a large crate with a big dog inside. He was the saddest dog you can imagine. A lady asked about him. "You would be sad, too," she was told, "if you were in his plight. He's chewed the tag off the crate, and doesn't know where he's going."

Sounds like many churches I know. The church today has resources untold. We have a skilled, well-educated, talented work force. We claim the allegiance of the best people in our community. We serve a Master who for 2,000 years has inspired people's hearts and changed their lives. And yet we are only a shadow of what we might be. What is the problem with us? My guess is that we don't know where we are going. We're not certain what we are supposed to be doing. We've chewed the tag off our crate and we're bogged down in a certain melancholia.

Thus we come to St. Paul's words in the first chapter of Ephesians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...." (RSV)

It would be impossible to explore in depth the complete meaning of Paul's words this morning. There are some clear spiritual principles, however, that we can discern in our text for the day.

THE FIRST IS THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN A SPECIAL PEOPLE. God has always performed His work through a chosen people. Since He is the divine Other since He transcends time and space-since His nature is Spirit and not flesh and blood, the only way He can communicate with us effectively is to incarnate Himself, to work through flesh and blood to accomplish His purposes. He began with the people of Israel. Then He worked through Jesus of Nazareth. Today He works through followers of that same Jesus. Because of who He is and what He is about, God always works through a special people.

Unfortunately, you and I do not always act like a special people.

Once a man attended a fair and saw another man leading a fine, well-groomed horse. He asked, "Is that a saddle horse?" The other replied, "No, sir. This horse will buck off a saddle. Nothing can stay on his back."

"Is he a driving horse, then?" the man asked. "No, he was hitched up once to a cart, but he made kindling wood of it," was the reply.

"Well, what is he good for? Why is he here?" the man asked. The answer was, "Style, man, style. Just look at the picture he makes."

The man went on to say, "Once I was in a church building and saw people clad in fine clothes coming into the morning service. I asked the preacher, `Are those people workers in the church?' `No,' he answered sadly. `Do they visit the sick and minister to the poor? Do they attend other services of the church?' `Never,' he answered.

"`There's that horse,' I said to myself. `Nothing but style.'" (1)

Sometimes you and I don't act like a very special people. And because we don't always act like a special people, the work of Christ is delayed.

Ernest Gordon found God in a Japanese prison camp during World War II. He wrote of his experience in a book called THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE KWAI. How did he find God? He found him through the witness of loving Christians, fellow prisoners, who were willing to give up even their lives for him. Unfortunately, when Ernest Gordon returned home to Scotland, convinced that he should become a minister, he found something else. He said, "As soon as I returned from the jungle I took up the study of theology at Edinburgh. My first impressions almost caused me to return immediately to the jungle!" What happened was that he attended services in a sparsely filled Church one Sunday evening. He was in full uniform. Before the service began he was asked to move because he was sitting in somebody else's pew! Fortunately, though he was taken aback by this experience, he wasn't turned off from the Church entirely. He finished seminary and went on to become chaplain at Princeton University. (2)

I wonder, though, how many people are turned off by Christians who have forgotten who they are. This may be particularly true of a church with a rich tradition like the church at Edinburgh. It is always tempting to congratulate ourselves on what we've already accomplished. There is danger for churches that are always looking back and reliving a noble past. Such a church has been compared to the fabled "floogee bird," which is said to fly backwards instead of forward, singing one monotonous refrain: "I don't know where I'm going, but just look where I've been!" (3) We need to be reminded from time to time who we are. God has chosen a special people.

WHAT IS MORE, GOD HAS REVEALED TO THIS SPECIAL PEOPLE HIS ETERNAL PLAN. When each of us leaves this room this morning, I want us to have a clear picture of what God has called us to be and to do. Having that clear, mental picture or vision is the first step in seeing God's plan realized. Any great work begins with a vision.

As you go up the Hudson River in New York, you can see the imposing George Washington Bridge. This impressive structure towers 600 feet high. It has a main span of 3,500 feet. Each of the four supporting cables is a yard thick and consists of nearly 27,000 wires. This is enough wire to circle the earth four times at the Equator. This bridge, used by nearly 24 million vehicles annually, cost $62 million to build. The imposing George Washington Bridge was first a dream in the minds of those who had vision. Then it was put on paper and every detail marked down before actual work was begun. (4)

Every great accomplishment begins with a vision, a dream, then a plan. Some of you may remember one of the more absurd shows that ever graced our television screens, the infamous "A Team." The black van careening around the corner on two wheels. B.A. is at the steering wheel. Face and Murdock sit back and relax as "The A Team" streaks away from the bad guys once again. In the copilot's seat, Hannibal reaches into the inside pocket of his jacket, pulls out a cigar, leans comfortably against the door of the van and with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, says, "I love it when a plan comes together!" (5)

Every great accomplishment begins with a vision, a dream, and then a plan. So it is with God's purpose for the world. God has a plan and He has revealed it to His chosen people! He has revealed it to us!

Sometime back a group of fortune tellers and seers had their crystal balls and tarot cards stolen at a gathering in Dublin, Ireland. One of them afterwards claimed, "We were aware something was about to happen, but we did not know what." The followers of Jesus know that something is about to happen and they know what. Even more importantly, they are a part of its occurrence. What, then, is this great dream, this great vision, this great plan?

GOD'S PLAN REVEALED TO HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE AND REALIZED THROUGH THEM AS WELL IS TO BRING INTO UNITY EVERYTHING IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. That's it. That is who we are and what we are about. Our task is to bring every man, woman and child on this earth into the family of God. Our president speaks of a new world order. God has in mind a new world order, as well, but it goes far beyond anything dreamed of by Mr. Bush. God's new world order means that every person in this world will live in dignity and harmony as children of God under the Lordship of Christ. That is God's new world order. And you and I are the agents of that revealed dream, vision, plan. Paul put it like this in 2 Corinthians 5:18, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and giving to us the ministry of reconciliation...."

And where do we begin? We begin right here, right now, reaching out in love to everyone with whom we come into contact. When we as a church fulfill that one simple mission, the gates of hell cannot long endure.

Dr. Fred Craddock, professor of New Testament and Homiletics at Emory University in Atlanta, tells about his growing up years in Middle Tennessee. Craddock's father did not go to church. In fact he was very critical of the church.

Once in a while the minister would come by to try to talk to Mr. Craddock. It did no good. He would say: "I know what you fellows down there at the church want. You want another name and another pledge. Right? Isn't that the business you're in? Another name and another pledge."

This always embarrassed Craddock's mother, who would retreat to the kitchen to cry. Occasionally an evangelist would come with the minister. Even the two of them could not get through to Craddock's father. He would always say: "You don't care about me! You want another name and another pledge. That's how the churches operate. You don't care about me."

He must have said that a thousand times, but there was one time he did not say it. The last time Fred Craddock saw his father was in a Veteran's Hospital. He was down to seventy-four pounds. They had taken out his throat. Radiation therapy had burned him badly. They had put in a tube so he could breathe, but he couldn't speak.

Around the room flowers were everywhere, on the table, in the windows and even on the floor. There were potted plants, cut flowers, and every sort of arrangement. They even had flowers on the table that you swing out over your bed to put food on. That was just as well since he couldn't eat anyway. Little cards were sprinkled in all the flowers and every one of them read something like this Men's Bible Class, Women's Fellowship, Children's Division, Youth Fellowship. Every organization you could imagine in the church had sent flowers along with stacks of cards from persons in the church.

Craddock's father saw him looking at the cards. Unable to speak, he picked up a pencil and wrote on the side of a Kleenex box a line from Shakespeare's Hamlet:

"In this harsh world, draw your breath
in pain to tell my story."

Fred Craddock read it and asked his father: "Dad, what is your story?" The speechless old man took the Kleenex box back and wrote a confession: "I was wrong! I was wrong!" (6)

Where do we begin to be a part of God's new world order? Right here, right now, with people this church can bring into His family. God has chosen a special people, and revealed to them an eternal plan, to bring into unity everything in heaven and on earth.

1. QUOTE.

2. MEET ME AT THE DOOR, New York: Harper and Row, 1969, pp. 32-33,24. From a sermon by Dr. Donald Strobe.

3. Charles W. Koller, EXPOSITORY PREACHING WITHOUT NOTES,(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962).

4. Edward L. Friedman, The Speaker's Handy Reference, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1967.)

5. Ken Abraham, DESIGNER GENES, (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1986).

6. From a sermon by Eric Ritz .

3
Amos was a normal, everyday working man. We hear about him in the first reading. He was an arborist. He ran a tree service. Amos' Tree Trimming, Inc. He lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, just south of the border with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. There were a lot of professional prophets of his day, people who would prophesy for a fee. They even had a professional prophet association. It was the AFT & AOQ, Association of Fortune Tellers and Assorted Other Quacks. Amos wasn't part of that scene. He worked in orchards. But God chose him, Amos, to deliver His Word and truth to the people of Bethel just over the border in the Northern Kingdom. Amaziel, the local authority, told Amos to shut up and get out, but Amos said he had no choice. "The lion has roared, who will not fear? God has spoken, who can but
prophesy?" That's *Amos 3:8.* So this ordinary man, Amos, became the vehicle of God's truth.

Four were fishermen. One was a hated tax collector. One a political
zealot. There was nothing extraordinary about any of the twelve that Jesus sent out to preach, to heal and to expel demons. They were ordinary people, given instructions to conduct themselves like prophets. And the Word of God worked through them.

God works through everyday people, including us. The Word of God wants to work through every person here. We have to "proclaim the word, in season and out of season" as St. Paul writes in *2 Tim 4:2.* We have to proclaim the truth we experience within us whether it is a time others want to hear it, in season, or whether it is a time they would rather we just keep quiet, out of season. We need to bring the message, the experience, the very presence of Jesus Christ to the world. I said “we”, not “I” but “we”. Some will listen to you who will not listen to me. Perhaps it is people your age who will say, "I want to be happy with life just as he or she is happy." Perhaps it will be people who respect and love you, such as your parents and brothers and sisters. For the older folks here, perhaps it will be people who look to you for guidance, such as your own children or grandchildren. Many people will hear the message clearer when it comes from you rather than from me or any priest. So proclaim the message.

And yes, there will be people who will reject the message. You may indeed have to move on and proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ to others, just as the disciples were told to move on if they are rejected. But don't stop praying for them. And be patient. Joy, happiness and the Presence of the Lord are contagious. Sometimes, though, it takes time for people to allow the Cure for life’s ills to heal them.

I want you to do something now, close your eyes and picture yourself gazing up into the sky. Then in the distance above you there is a huge bird soaring. At first you think it must be a plane or a helicopter, but you don’t hear a motor, what you hear is the flapping of wings and the calling of an eagle. The eagle starts circling down, coming closer and closer to you. You are not frightened, just intrigued. Finally, it lights right next to you. It’s huge. Then it turns its head to you, holds out a wing, and touches its back. It’s inviting you to climb onto its back. It wants to take you for a ride. So you

do. And you soar with that eagle. The earth looks so beautiful from its back. The heavens seem so close. It is all rather glorious.

But it is not enough for you to be soaring on the eagles back. The eagle sets down in the middle of your friends, your neighborhood, your workplace, your
family. And the eagle looks at you and at them. You realize it is telling you to invite them to climb up onto its back and soar with you. And so we hold out our hands for others to join us. That is what today’s readings tell us to do. We are to call out to others to join us on the amazing journey that is the Christian life. We are to tell them, proclaim to them, that the eagle is Jesus Christ. And the wonderful journey with Him, on his back, is the Christian Life.

We climb onto the Eagle. We hold out our hands. And we invite others to come with us and soar.

*This material is used with permission of its author, Rev. Msgr. Joseph A. Pellegrino, Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL*

4 Fr Desiano

We have all become very sensitive about our surroundings, especially fearing to go someplace strange or different. Two years ago we might enter a hotel room with a smile, wondering how big the TV screen might be; now we enter wondering if they have sanitized the room enough or if we will end up bringing a deadly virus to someone else because someone didn’t clean enough.

All of this reminds me of an ironic movie called “The Accidental Tourist,” in which the protagonist, a travel editor, tries to make every hotel room he stays in look exactly the same. It’s as if he never left home. He always wants those things that make him feel self- assured surrounding him in the room.

Jesus is not into accidental tourism in the Gospel today; Jesus is into mission. Rather than having his apostles hang out and feel comfortable, Jesus is sending them out to do the very things that he himself has done. It’s as if a child went to swimming lessons and now it’s time to swim without the teacher’s support. “You have seen my ministry; now do it yourself.” Amos wanted to stay home, as the first reading shows, but God gave him a mission bigger than his flock and his sycamore trees.
Jesus knows this will not be easy because we are most comfortable staying in our own zone. He advises them to travel very lightly—not to bring extra things or extra money. He wants them to go out in great simplicity so that they will be forced to deal with others—to meet them, to engage with them, to depend on them for food and beddings, and to proclaim the Kingdom of God to them.
In other words, Jesus sends them out in great simplicity and he gives them a very simple message: they were to preach repentance, that is, a new way of seeing things because God was active in their lives. Their deeds were to bring healing and victory over the very forces that we think hold us back: cast out demons and anoint the sick to cure them. The demons are the illnesses of our spirits which distort and limit them; our spirits need healing even more than our bodies.
He also teaches them not to worry about failure. Some people will hear their voices and be unmoved; but our mission is to speak God’s message, to do the deeds that show God’s presence, and trust that those who are ready will be able to see this. The ones who hear you will become part of a community of people who have been called and chosen to experience God in such a way that he want to spread that experience to others.
As believers we may look stranger and stranger to people around us. This may make us want to crawl in a shell and play safe. But Jesus does not call us to crawl into shells. He calls us to be apostles and ambassadors of his healing and grace. He knows we are cautious. “Trust me,” he says. “I am always with you.”
Perhaps each one of us can think of someone who needs a word of healing or consolation. After what we’ve been through, that might include just about everyone! But, for now, just think of one person and realize that God is sending you to that troubled heart. Start with that hurt, focus on God’s healing presence, and let the Kingdom shine through you.
Now if we all did that, what might the impact be?