

- For many priests today is our favorite day of the year, for this is the day that we remember that God has given us two very remarkable and magnificent gifts: the priesthood and the Eucharist.
- These two inextricable gifts are proof positive of what St. John tells us in the Gospel tonight, namely, that Jesus “loved His own in the world, and He loved them to the end”, for outside of His death on the cross, Christ gave us no other more concrete proofs of His love than by giving us the gift of the Eucharist and the gift of the priesthood.
- Indeed, when we think about the Eucharist or the priesthood, we should think of God’s love, for both the Eucharist and the priesthood are incarnations of God’s love for all of us.
- Not content to simply suffer, die and rise again for our redemption, Jesus Christ wanted also to leave us a memorial of His death and resurrection. Indeed, He wanted to leave us His very body and blood as real food and real drink.
- And thus we have the inseparable gifts of the priesthood and Eucharist: inseparable because we cannot have one without the other. There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood, and there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist relies on the priesthood for its very existence. It is the priest who confects the Eucharist. Without a priest saying the words of consecration that St. Paul speaks of in the second reading, those words remain precisely that: just words.
- But priests are also dependent on the Eucharist. It is the Eucharist that gives the priest his identity and purpose. The Eucharist is the primary reason why we priests are ordained.
- We are ordained to sanctify you, the Body of Christ. Our vocation is to lead you in the paths of holiness, and the primary way we do that is by confecting the Eucharist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.
- The seven sacraments of the Church are the primary means that God uses in order to communicate to us His saving grace, and this is especially true of the Eucharist, which we also call the Most Blessed Sacrament.
- Whenever we receive Holy Communion worthily, we are saved! God’s saving grace is given to us in that moment: our venial sins are wiped away, we are strengthened against future mortal sins, and we grow in spiritual communion with our Lord.
- As worthy reception of the Eucharist strengthens the bonds of charity between us and Christ, it also reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.
- Moreover, participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass “identifies us with the Heart of Jesus. It sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints.”
- Indeed, the Eucharist is our foretaste of Heaven.
- And all of this grace is veiled for us under the humble appearance of a simple white host! We find this saving grace waiting for us in a cup: crimson salvation at the bottom of a chalice!
- In our first reading tonight we hear the story of the first Passover meal, which is a prefigurement of the Mass. Celebrating the Passover was the way the Israelites consummated their covenant with the Lord.
- In the same way, whenever we eat His flesh and drink His blood, the covenantal relationship that we first formed with Christ in our baptism is consummated and renewed.

- Just as a husband and wife consummate their love for one another by taking each other unto themselves, so too do we consummate our covenant with God by taking Him unto ourselves in the act of receiving Holy Communion.
- But for any of this to happen, there must first be a man who can bridge Heaven and earth, and that man is a priest – a man set apart by God through the laying on of hands, who stands in the place of Jesus and carries on His ministry.
- The priesthood is the extension of Christ’s ministry throughout history; it is the human embodiment of Christ’s sacrifice. We exist to make Christ incarnate once again.
- The priesthood exists to offer sacrifice – primarily to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and in a secondary way to live a life of sacrifice for the sake of the people of God.
- As priests we are called to live at the foot of the cross, to gather the blood of Christ as it falls from His holy wounds and to dispense it to all of you. Ours is a life of sacrificial service to the people of God for the sake of helping you grow in holiness.
- The sign of our sacrificial service is expressed tonight through the ritual of washing feet. Just as Jesus washed the feet of His 12 apostles, so too do we relive this humble act of Christ’s in order to illustrate our dedication to sacrificial service.
- And so tonight, as we gather to give thanks to God for these two marvelous gifts, I’d like to ask you to pray for us priests.
- Pray for me, your pastor, and for all priests, because we rely on your prayers and your sacrifices so that we can live the life of sacrifice to which our vocation calls us. Pray for us so that we can serve you as the Gospel demands.
- While the life we live as priests is actually very privileged and blessed, it’s also very difficult. None of us ever handles the demands and responsibilities of priesthood as well as we should. So please pray for us.
- On a personal note, I’d like to say tonight that I love being a priest, and I love being your pastor. I am so very grateful to God for calling me to this most sublime vocation, and I’m so grateful to you for your love and support.
- My hope is that I am a good pastor. And for any times that I have failed you, I sincerely ask for your forgiveness and for your prayers.
- As we go forward this evening to sit with our Lord in His agony in the Garden and stand with Him tomorrow as He pours out His very life for us on Calvary, may God give each of us the grace to unite ourselves more fully to Jesus, who is the living bread come down from Heaven.