

## Corpus Christi, 2018.

3-6-2018. 'Take'.

In 1594, an Italian Renaissance painter named Tintoretto, completed a masterpiece named: "The Last Supper." One of the many remarkable qualities of this painting is that it does not present this most memorable scene as many others have typically depicted it. It does not have the dark, hushed, awe-inspiring atmosphere with the 12 Apostles totally focused on Jesus amid a silent sense of wonder and amazement.

Instead, what is most notable about this rendition of this famous supper scene is all the activity going on in the room: serving people busying themselves; other servants looking wistfully at the table that appears to have no room for them; a cat poking her nose into a basket of dishes; and a servant talking to a disciple who is holding up his hands to halt the servant's speech, presumably so he can hear what Jesus is saying.

Busyness, distractions, interruptions.

This painting reminds me of our minds while we are participating some 2000 years later in this re-enactment of that very same event: the Last Supper, which we now call the Mass.

It's easy for most of us to find ourselves somewhere in that Tintoretto painting. Like those people in the painting, we may discover ourselves approaching the Lord's table with a glow of attentiveness to the moment. But, we may also find our minds wandering, our hearts distracted, our focus elsewhere.

What Tintoretto is possibly suggesting in this painting is that our faith will never be perfect or complete, our love for others will falter at times, and our best intentions will weaken and fall flat in the long run.

Certainly, we often find ourselves at the Lord's table not with a glow of ardent love, but with a scowl similar to that of Judas as pictured in the painting. Sometimes, like the one character in the painting, we have to halt the distractions of others around us so that we can attend to what Jesus is saying to us; other times we may find that we are the ones doing the distracting. Sometimes, we may find that our distractions are caused by

legitimate issues of crisis in our lives, the pain of terrible loss, the heartache of something affecting our family life, or the fear of having to face some perceived danger.

This lively, busy, distracting Tintoretto painting is a reminder that currents of emotion, interruptions and distractions swirl under the surface for all of us as we approach the taking of the sacred bread and the drinking of the sacred blood.

But, here's the beauty of this painting and of our life situation as believing people: Jesus is saying the very same words to you and me as he did so long ago to a room full of distracted, scared, half-believing, even treacherous people – 'take' and eat, 'take' and drink.

No matter what moods we bring with us. No matter what fears we carry in our hearts. No matter what distractions hold our minds hostage. No matter what sin shames us. No matter what. **'Take'**.

That's what Jesus was telling those first disciples at his last supper with them – even while the servants scurried about, even while Judas plotted silently. **'Take'**.

This is what Jesus beckons us to do in the midst of all the busyness and all our heartaches. He asks us to join him in a meal. He asks us to take his body and blood into the deepest part of ourselves.

And he asks us to do this in the hope that we will find there the strength and the nourishment and the power to heal our inner brokenness. And there also, to create a heart so filled with conviction that it can deafen all the inner torments. **'Take'**.

As an aside: The painting does not represent the moment Jesus hands the Bread of his Body to one of the Apostles, but an earlier moment that is equally as meaningful. St. John tells us in his Gospel how Jesus predicts how one of those present will betray him. St. Peter gestured to St. John to ask Jesus quietly: "Who is it?" Jesus responds to that question by saying: "I will dip some bread in the sauce and give it to him, he is the man." With

that Jesus took a bit of bread, dipped it in the sauce and placed it on Judas' lips.

It was the kind of gesture lovers make, when they want to show particular affection for the one they love. Here it is a last effort by Jesus to deter Judas from the betrayal he is about to commit.

Can we see the relevance that has to our own betrayals and denials of Jesus? And yet he tells us: **'Take'**.