

The words we heard Jesus say in the Gospel just now, about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, shocked the people who heard him then, and even today, converts, people who come through the RCIA, struggle to accept this. And yet, for us, it has become almost routine, - maybe a bit too routine. So today I'd like to focus on what the Eucharist has become for us, represented by that little red lamp at the side of the Tabernacle.

When you think about it, the human body is a magnificent organism, - maybe the most magnificent organism in creation. But, what gives life and energy to the whole body, to our brain, our lungs, our liver, our head and our hands is the heart. Often, we are not even aware of it. Our heart is beating right now. We take it for granted.

The Church, too, is a great organism, an elaborate, massive world-wide institution, built up of many layers of structures, thousands of apostolates and ministries, millions and millions of people on every continent, in every country, but at its heart, at its centre, is the Eucharist. That's the heart of the Church. The Eucharist is something that we may take for granted, but it is essential for our Catholic life, like the beating of our heart.

There is much we have in common with other Christians, such as affirming that "Jesus is our Lord and Saviour", and "God's Word in Sacred Scripture", and the truths of the Creed, - but what is distinctive about Catholic life and Catholic spirituality is the Eucharist. It is central to our life, more than we realize.

When you go to another church, new or old, did you notice that your eye instinctively scans the inside of the church until it hits the red lamp? Suddenly, whatever the architecture or location of the parish, you know you're at home. So again, let's reflect on what that red lamp means.

That red lamp signals the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Not a symbolic or emotional presence, but a real presence. When we leave the church today, that red lamp continues to burn because the Real Presence of Christ remains even when nobody is here.

During these cold days of winter, the red lamp burns because He is here. During the fresh days of Spring, when new life bursts forth, that lamp burns because He is here. During the months of Summer when we travel to so many places, the red lamps burns, because He is here, and during the glorious last hurrah of autumn, the red lamp burns because He is here.

When we are young, He is here; in our teens He is here. When adult and senior He is here. Our Lord truly abides with us in all the seasons of our life. That's one meaning of the red lamp.

A second meaning of the red lamp is that the Lord is here as food. In a simple yet powerful and loving way He is here for his people as food, as Eucharist to be received! Whether we are rich or poor, young or old, He comes to us as food. There is no discrimination here. The Lord does not look at your background, education or politics. He looks only at your heart, and the Risen Christ lowers Himself to come to us as food. Can we love like that? Can we show even an ounce of that same kind of self-sacrificing love for others as Jesus shows for us? That's a second meaning of that red lamp – the sacrificial love of Christ, and a reminder that we are called to love each other in much the same way.

A third meaning of that red lamp is that Jesus is always accessible. We can come here before the Lord at any time. Sometimes we come like Jacob, wrestling with the Lord; sometimes we come like Elijah, to discern his presence in the whispers of life; sometimes we come like Joshua to do battle for our soul or the soul of another. Here we can bring all the aches and pains, needs and yearnings of our wounded world. Here we can receive the healing balm of his Grace.

To come before the Lord in the Eucharist is to come to the same place where missionaries prayed for strength; where the great religious orders were born; where popes and bishops have sought inspiration; where kings and emperors have come for wisdom; where monks and religious have received courage; where the sick have found inner healing; where parents have prayed, where widows have sought comfort; where young people prayed for a date; where people throughout the world come with every

prayer, every petition, every need ever known to the human heart; where people who were spiritually lost have found their way.

To come before the Eucharist is to come to our place at Wisdom's table, as we were invited in our first reading; where we can come, as St. Paul writes in the second reading, to understand the will of the Lord. It is to come to the place we can always call home. These are some of the meanings of that little red lamp; Christ's presence; His sacrificial love; His accessibility, That red lamp is the guarantee that you and I are never alone.

*(Acknowledgement: Much of the above homily was taken from 'Captured Fire' by Fr. S. Joseph Krempa)*