

Homily for Ordination, June 26th, 2011

Today the church community celebrates the feast of Corpus Christi. We are gathered here to celebrate the ordinations of two women, one to the diaconate and one to the priesthood. The feast of Corpus Christi with its deep connections to the Eucharist and the Sacrament of ordination have much in common. Both deal with the grace our God has poured out onto our lives through the incarnation of the Holy One in our Brother Jesus. Both concern the way we commemorate Jesus' presence with us here again and again when we gather around the table.

We heard Jesus' powerful and provocative words that His body is the living bread, flesh for the life of the world and that our lives depend upon eating this flesh and drinking this blood. In the reading from Hebrews, this same Jesus is declared a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek because, like Aaron he followed God's call and because he learned to be obedient to God's will through suffering. Isaiah tells us what the one upon whom God's Spirit rests, the one who has been anointed by God, is able to accomplish. Jesus claims that these words have been fulfilled on the day he read this passage in the Synagogue in Capharnaum.

There should be sheer joy then that we can celebrate the ordinations of Monique and Maria on the feast of Corpus Christi. However, the sound of their names alone makes it apparent that there is tension and pain interlaced with the joy in what we are about to do, a tension which would not exist were their names Michael and Marvin.

There is a poem by Frances Croake Frank which powerfully expresses this pain. I have never met anyone who knows this woman, Francis Croake. Rumor has it that she is a Catholic nun. Once you hear this poem, you may understand why she remains anonymous:

Did the woman say,
When she held him for the first time in the dark of a stable,
After the pain and the bleeding and the crying,
"This is my body, this is my blood"?

Did the woman say,
When she held him for the last time in the dark rain on a hilltop, after the pain and the
Bleeding and the dying,
"This is my body, this is my blood"?

Well that she said it to him then,
For dry old men,
Brocaded robes belying barrenness,
Ordain that she not say it for him now.

Why, I ask my brother Benedict and my brother bishops, or better, why not? Where does this archaic, relentless sexism come from? When will you stop stressing the maleness of Jesus rather than his humanity? When will you refrain from turning symbols into doctrine? When will you end exercising power over, rather than with the people of God with your segregating

clericalism? When will you discontinue to see yourselves as dispensers of grace? When will you refrain from excluding those who listen to their conscience? When will you stop demanding that all of us speak to our God in the form you prescribe and forbid us to call Her Mother? When will you look at the world without this dualism that pits spirit against nature, historical fact against present experience, sacred against profane? When will you stop using the Eucharist as a political weapon? Above all, when will you appreciate women and their experiences in the same way you cherish those of men? When will you stop harming women, children and men, too, and our earth with your archaic understanding of, and destructive rules on sexuality. And specifically, today on this day of ordination, I ask you: When will you respect the body of a woman as holy enough to stand close to the altar? Is it not one of your dogmas that God respected the body of our Mother Mary enough to raise this body into heaven?

But rather than dwell on that which we presently do not have, let us focus our minds and hearts on that which we can do to renew the church we love. When we say: Corpus Christi / Body of Christ, is it only the bread and wine, the body and blood of our brother Jesus that we envision? Or is there another powerful image coming into our minds? I am thinking of the image of the church community as Corpus Christi. Maria and Monique, what can you, a newly ordained deacon and a newly ordained priest, contribute to bring life and nourishment to the body of Christ, our church?

I urge you to draw a large circle. Jesus invited all to the table. Do as he did. Inasmuch as you find yourselves on the margins, it makes sense to serve those who are on the margins as well. Follow the example of one of your sisters who recently at the Cathedral served the body of Christ to those who had been rejected because they were wearing rainbow sashes. Center your liturgies and actions around hospitality. Feed the people of God. Feeding and nourishing, including from our own bodies, is something we women have done since the beginning of time. Respect the priesthood of all believers. If people ask you how you can request ordination and at the same time believe in the priesthood of all believers, you may answer: We are willing to live with that ambiguity. As a matter of fact, a greater acceptance of ambiguity is something we as women can bring into a church mired in dogma, rules and definitions. May your priesthood and diaconate be inspired by the washing of the feet. Do not seek power but rather empowerment of others. Remember that Sarah's circle leads to heaven as surely as Jacob's ladder. But also, do not yield to unjust power. Don't excommunicate anyone, including yourself.

When you preach and teach, ask your sisters and brothers to respect women's bodies, including the body of our mother earth.

Hold our Mother Mary in your hearts as an image of priesthood. If they tell you that you cannot act in persona Christi, then tell them that you act in persona Mariae. Her female body carried him for nine months after all.

The Spirit Sophia will empower you to accomplish what Isaiah in our first reading describes:

"Give them a wreath of flowers instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of tears, a cloak of praise instead of despair."