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## FATHERS AND THE EUCHARIST

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. We honor in a special way the fact that Jesus gives us His Body and Blood in the Eucharist at every Mass. Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist is the greatest gift a human being can receive this side of heaven. And it's the best reason for being a Catholic.

Today is also Father's Day. So I'm going to make a connection between the Body and Blood of Jesus and the role of fathers in the family and in the community.

What does the Bible say about the role of husbands and fathers?

We're familiar with the passage of Saint Paul in Ephesians 5, where he writes that wives should be submissive to their husbands.

We're less familiar with a companion passage in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 3, where Saint Paul says "I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and a husband the head of his wife."

In other words, the authority of a husband and father in the family comes from his submission and obedience to Jesus. His wife and children need to know that the father's decisions, his actions, are based on his relationship with Jesus. He doesn't just make stuff up. He doesn't just decide on his own what is best for the family. He prays and asks Jesus and the Holy Spirit to guide him in leading his family.

How many husbands and fathers have accepted and embraced Jesus as their boss? I don't know. I hope it's a lot.

I think there is a tendency, however, for many men to make personal achievement in their work, their careers, as their top priority.

We've been running a series in the parish in the last few weeks called Sharing Christ. In a recent exercise, everyone participating was asked to tell their stories of how their faith matured.

Three of the men explained that, for many years, getting ahead in their work was their main preoccupation. At some point, and for various reasons, each of them decided to make a change in their priorities and in their relationship with Jesus.

One of the men has given me permission to share parts of his story. And so I'm going to quote extensively from what he wrote.

"Just six months ago, I was a lukewarm Catholic. I regularly missed Sunday Mass and went to confession only twice in thirty years... I had everything I ever wanted, but something was

missing. For years, I felt an emptiness inside. I sometimes wondered what the purpose of life was and the reason for my existence.”

“Last year, I signed up for an ACTS retreat, so my kids would stop nagging me. This was the catalyst that led me to where I am now. I have always taken the Holy Spirit for granted, kind of like the step-child of the Trinity. I am not sure how to fully describe my conversion, but this experience was when I received the Holy Spirit for the first time.”

“One word to best describe my transformation is **love**. I felt the love of Jesus during this four day retreat. I also truly believed [for the first time] that Jesus was **real** and not just words on a page or someone I would know only after I died. During Sunday Mass at the parish on the last day of the retreat, I was holding back the tears as I sensed this wave of love in my presence.”

“After receiving the Holy Spirit, I was hungry for more. I started reading the Bible for the first time. Because of John Chapter 6 about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, I started to go to daily Mass whenever possible so that I could feed my hunger for Christ. I also began to pray daily. The words of Jesus in the Bible strengthened my belief, and I could feel his presence.”

“I soon realized that it was not enough just to go to Sunday Mass. In order to know and follow Jesus, I must put God at the center of my life and to regularly pray to Him. As a mere, weak human being who is always tempted by the sins of this world, I had to surround myself with Catholic friends to help me stay on the righteous path towards Christ.”

“My life’s purpose is so clear now. Love is the answer to all my questions. I finally understand God’s love, His mercy and grace. He loves me so much that He gave His only Son. His love has blessed me with amazing joy and peace that I have never before experienced.”

Do Christian husbands and fathers need Jesus to fulfill their responsibilities to their families? Yes, they do. In addition to accepting and following Jesus as their personal boss, they also have to sacrifice themselves for their families just as Jesus did for all of humanity. That is made clear in Saint Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians.

Husbands and fathers can only overcome their own selfishness and pride and have a spirit of sacrifice towards their families with the grace that comes from a relationship with Jesus and especially through the grace that comes from receiving Him in the Eucharist.

Just like the huge crowd in today’s Gospel, which had only five loaves and two fish to feed them, every husband and father does not have on his own what he needs to lead his family. It’s through the Eucharist that Jesus takes what they have and multiplies it with His grace.

In the Eucharist, Jesus communicates to all of us, “This is my body which is given up for you.”

And with the grace that comes from the Eucharist, fathers can say, and really mean, “Jesus, this is my body which is given up for my wife and children. I can only do this with Your grace, with Your help.”