

I'd like to start off this homily with a question for you. If you were offered the option of the following: A long life, which would be flat and boring or a short life, but full of meaning and life – which would you choose?

Yogi Berra once said that, "If you come to a fork in the road, take it." A bit of satire in such a statement, as it is a non-answer. We've all heard politicians do the same – they get a difficult question and when they are finished "answering" it we realize they never really did answer. In today's gospel Jesus is very clear about the path we are take and that is the path that leads to fullness of life as opposed to that which the world offers.

Unfortunately many choose the other, the food of the world. Have you ever wondered why in various nature parks we are told not to feed the animals? One reason is that if others have done so, the animal may become rather aggressive against the person who does not feed them. A second reason is that the animals become addictive to the food (of the world) offered to them, so much so that they will no longer eat what is natural to them. I read once about how various deer were dying of malnutrition because they would only eat Doritos, forgoing the very food that keeps them alive. Is this so unlike the soul, which is fed only with the food of the world that it is dying of malnutrition? Fed with a steady diet of what only feeds the world, the soul truly years for the true food of eternal life?

When I was home for vacation, I decided to bush hog one of our various pastures. We have two types of bush hogs; one which hooks up to a tractor and another that hooks up to a four wheeler, and cuts the places a tractor cannot go. It was the four wheeler version that I was seeking to use. I noticed that one of its tires was flat, so I had to take it in to be fixed. After doing this, I then attempted to hook the four wheeler up to the bush hog, only to discover that the ball of the four wheeler was too big for the bush hog. I then tried to remove it, only to discover that bolt would not move, as it was rusted shut and only moved with the nut and the ball. I had to take it to my father to assist me, as he held another wrench as I pulled the other. After much effort it moved and I was able to replace it. I put in gas and oil and then went to start it. It would not start. My brother-in-law informed me the carburetor hat to be replaced. After all this effort I replied that I had just wasted three hours of my life for nothing! We do so often in life, plowing mindlessly through the internet or what have feel so empty in doing so.

In the gospel we heard to today there was a word repeated over in virtually every sentence and that was the word, "life". In following Jesus, we are promised life. When we do something for Christ, we never feel as though we have lost anything. Go to visit someone in need, we never come away feeling we have lost several hours of our lives – no, we feel as though we have gained something. If I finished praying to God for one hour, I never feel as though I have lost an hour; I instead feel renewed as if I have gained life. (Though some of my prayers to God may have not exactly been much, so much so that God may have felt that I have taken an hour of His life – just kidding!)

I would like at this moment to pause and address the question of what it means to say that Christ is *alive* in the Sacrament of the Eucharist – as certain questions have been addressed to me over the years concerning this. While I was pastor in Radford, we had a strong Ecumenical relationship with various churches in the city (somewhat like Stuart Circle here in Richmond).

Every Lent we would try to come up with some sort of Ecumenical retreat involving the various churches. In one particular year we decided that we would invite the parishioners to each church, whereby each might have a display of what is central or meaningful to the faith and then provide an overview of their beliefs. When they eventually journeyed to St. Jude Catholic Parish, we had all the various vessels and objects that were central to the richness of our faith. Someone commented that it looked like a Roman Catholic yard sale!

During the course of conversation, one gentleman pointed to the tabernacle and asked what it was for? I responded saying, "That is where we keep the consecrated hosts." To which he replied, "Are they bio-degradable?" Perfectly logical coming from his particular faith tradition – and I mean not to ridicule his question, as some faith traditions see the Eucharist as no more than a symbol. Others believe that Jesus is present in the Eucharist only at communion, but when it is finished, he is no longer there and so the Dixie-cups they may have used for the wine can be thrown away. And then there are those that believe he is only present depending upon the faith of the one receiving him.

Now, what say of the Roman Catholic belief? You know the old question that if a tree falls and the forest and no one is there, does it make a sound? We might ask the same question of the Eucharist, "If no one is there, is Jesus still present?" The answer is yes, 24/7 – if the doors are unlocked or locked, Jesus is always present.

Does the faith of the person make a difference concerning his Presence? The answer is no, it makes no difference concerning the faith of the one receiving Jesus, as he is fully present. However, the effectiveness of his Presence can be affected by the person's faith. Remember a while back ago we were told that Jesus could work not miracles in his hometown because of their lack of faith. He was fully present to them, but his presence was not effective, because of their lack of faith.

The same could be said of me and our Eucharistic ministers. If we show no reverence and are rather lackadaisical concerning the Eucharist – it will affect people's faith in the real presence. If we show no recognition that it is Jesus, alive in the Eucharist, there is a chance many will begin to forget he is even here, present among us.

Another question I often hear is: "Is it okay to receive only the Body of Christ and not the Blood of Christ? In so doing, do I just receive half of Jesus?" (i.e., Just the Body, not the Blood.) The answer is that in whatever you choose, you still receive the fullness of Christ. The reason that both are offered is to better represent the Scriptures in which Jesus offers us both his Body and His Blood. Jesus is fully offered in both species – if we skip the chalice, we do not just receive his Body. In each, Jesus is present in soul, divinity, Body and Blood.

In Genesis we are told that when we ate the forbidden fruit we died. In today's passage Jesus is telling us to eat and drink of his Body and Blood and we will live forever. In Genesis, God drove humanity out of the Garden of Eden, but in Jesus, we are being invited back to live forever with God.

Yes, in the Eucharist, we receive the very life of God. Listen again to what Jesus says: "I have life because of the Father so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me." He is giving us the same life the Father gave him. To believe this, to accept him with our *amens*, means that we become consecrated as his very Body and Blood, just as the wine and bread were consecrated. In so doing, we are to offer ourselves, our life in Him, to the world. I am only able to partake in this Eucharist because someone passed on the life of God given to them – just as Jesus did the life the Father gave him. That would be my parents and individuals I have met throughout my life. The same is true of everyone gathered here today: There are people in your lives that passed on the life of God to you as Jesus did from the very beginnings.

To fully receive this life, then, it is a life that must be shared and in that sharing the life of God is strengthened within us each time we do so. We can do so in heroic ways or in simple ways, like a life giving smile to someone or using our words to give life to someone. Yes, in this giving of life, we find fullness of true life.

+There is an old Chinese tale about a woman whose only son died. In her grief, she pleaded with a monk renowned for his holiness: "What prayers do have that can take away this sorrow of mine?" Instead of sending her away or trying to reason with her, the monk said, "Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life."

The woman set off at once in search of such a magical mustard seed. She came first to a splendid mansion, knocked at the door, and said, "I am looking for a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? It is very important to me." They told her, "You've certainly come to the wrong place," and then began to describe the tragic things that had befallen their household. The woman said to herself, *Who is better able to help these poor unfortunate people than I who have had misfortune of my own?* And so she stayed to comfort them, and then went on in her search for a home that had never known sorrow.

But wherever she stopped, whether hovel or palace, she found one tale after another of sadness and misfortune. Ultimately, she became so involved in ministering to other people's grief that she forgot her quest for the magical mustard seed, never realizing that it had, in fact, *driven the sorrow out of her life.*