

Did you hear about the passing (just last week) of the famous comedian – Don Rickles? He was the master of insults. Even other famous comedians were uncomfortable being in Don Rickles' company – on stage (or in the audience) – because they knew they would be made fun of brutally. Sarcastically they called him – “Mr. Warmth!” And even God was routinely harangued and verbally abused by Don Rickles.

So my friend, Father Arcoleo at Holy Redeemer sent out an email - which said “Please offer Mass for the repose of the soul of Donald J Rickles just in case God didn't think his insults were all that funny.

Don Rickles has nothing to do with Holy Thursday. But, I would like to begin this homily for the Mass of The Lord's Supper with the polar opposite of Don Rickles [and] one of my favorite topics (over the last 9 months) – (namely), Father Zachary Callahan. Father Zach is obviously the exact opposite personality of Don Rickles. He's not here at this time of the day because it's already past his “self-imposed” curfew for bed time. But thankfully, he's doing extraordinarily well after his illness in early February which coincided with his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The other day we were talking about his 10-day ‘excursion’ to South Nassau Hospital. So much of what he mentioned connects with his priesthood which we celebrate today and with this Liturgy of the Last Supper – with its unique feature of the Mandatum – the “mandate” that Jesus gives to be personally and even physically connected to attending to others.

The other day, Father Zach was talking again about the “marvelous” experience he had in the hospital. (He even thought the food was “delicious.”) He spoke about how these strangers cared for him and how he trusted that the prodding and the poking – was the Lord's touch through others. He said he felt like a “living cadaver” ~ who was treated so gently by the student nurses. He's a person who is “amazed” by the simple things of life - just as the Apostles were amazed at the Lord's “touch” in this Gospel scene. And Father Zach said that what amazed him the most were the transfusions of blood he received while in the hospital. He said: “somebody I never met gave blood – for me” - the blood that not only saved his life – but has really energized him even more since his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday visitation to the hospital.

So the first thought I'd like to offer tonight is the idea of “blood,” the life sustaining fluid that we each have coursing through our bodies keeping us alive. The Easter Triduum which we've already entered is about the life-giving blood of Jesus [poured out on the Cross] coursing through history through the church and our parish and hopefully, pulsating through each of us here tonight generating an outreach of mutual interest in serving others as Jesus has done for us.

How many have ever donated blood? It's a simple process with a possibly profound and maybe life-saving impact. If you have donated blood, have you ever thought about where or rather, in whom your blood was eventually given? Maybe someone you know has some of your blood within them and neither one of you knows. It's very possible.

Likewise, has anybody else ever received a blood transfusion? I wonder whose blood Father Zach received. It must be a remarkable and awesome experience to know (like Fr Zach) that I'm receiving the lifeblood of another person. Someone else's living cells are flowing in my bloodstream giving me life.

To receive a blood transfusion from famous person would be especially exciting, because *that* illustrious person's life-blood would now be joined to mine! But something even more wonderful happens at Holy Communion. The Body and Blood of Jesus enter my body and, becomes one with me. The Body and Blood of Jesus enter each one of us and we become one – through him, and with him and in him. For many of us, we receive Communion so often that we can forget about this awesome reality and we can take it for granted. It can become an occupational habit of regular church-goers.

In the Eucharist, the lifeblood of Jesus (of God's own self) now courses through our being. We carry the divine blood within us. Each of us is united with God through a bond of blood. Our hands, our feet, our brain and tongues now can function with the spark of divinity.

Can we bear such a heavy responsibility? That's the question for tonight. Once you donate blood, you really don't know in whom it will wind up. Likewise, if you receive a blood transfusion – you don't know whose blood you're receiving. And, once we drink the Blood of Christ, we can't see it anymore. What we can see is the effects of receiving the transfusion of Jesus' blood. We see it not primarily in piety, but in the washing of feet. By lowering Himself to the work of a servant, Jesus showed us that we must put others first; put ourselves out; and be of service. That's Eucharist. That's how we can see and feel the effects of the spiritual "blood transfusion" that we get every time we receive the Eucharist. "Do you realize what I have done for you," He says, "I have given you a model to follow."

Tonight's Gospel passage comes where we expect to find Jesus' most famous line from the Last Supper: "This is my body. This is my blood." Instead of pointing at the bread and wine, He gives an example of service. The Eucharist involves more than food and drink – it involves commitment, community, faith and selflessness. Other New Testament writers tell us Jesus said, "Do this" in reference to the celebration of the Eucharist. St. John's Jesus says it in reference to the service of washing the feet. For this reason, the liturgy of Holy Thursday invites us to imitate, literally, the example of Jesus. If we are believers, if we share in the bread and the cup, then we also share in service.

You know, sometimes people say that the washing of the feet is too old-fashioned, and that it doesn't fit our modern culture. Sometimes parishes search for a more meaningful adaptation – like washing hands, or shining shoes. But it's hard to beat the shocking humility of the original gesture. It didn't fit Jesus' culture very well either. Peter objected to the whole idea. The service to which Jesus calls us also doesn't fit the culture we live in. Holy Thursday invites us to the table not as guests who dine and run, but as hosts who eat and serve. The meal isn't over until the cleanup. And the clean-up always involves genuine gestures that express who we are as disciples of Jesus.

Let me offer three images that surfaced on social media this past week – two positive and one negative that underscore the importance of candid symbols. The first image of concrete service is Pope Francis – this past week – opening up a laundromat near the Vatican for the poor. For him the signs, the gestures and the personal example demonstrate what the Eucharist and church and "holy communion" (holy connections) are all about.

He had previously opened a place where the poor of Rome could get hair-cuts and/or take a shower. The laundromat is a way of washing feet and socks and people's needs. That's the Eucharist in action.

Another image that stands out is President Trump greeting an Army veteran who had lost both of his arms in Afghanistan. The touch or the feeling of a handshake would be lost on such a person with prosthetic arms. Trump realized this and the image shows him touching (patting) the man's face – so he can feel the human connection. Connections involve human touch such as that.

That's why for St. John – it's not just the sacred meal – it's a concrete gesture.

A third image to consider is a negative one. It's the scene that went viral the other day of the man on the United Airlines Flight in Chicago being dragged off a plane by security. So much for the "friendly skies" of United. They lost a billion dollars in bad public relations.

Likewise, we as disciples and as a church lose credibility when our actions and gestures don't match our words or piety. "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me. I was in need and you did not help me."

Our actions or inactions – send a message and project a good or negative example. It’s a lot easier – for us – to fall back on our knees in silent adoration as we will do after this Mass, than it is to follow Jesus’s example and tradition of practical, active, concrete and consistent service for others.

The other side of the coin of “DO THIS in memory of me” clearly refers to Jesus laying down his life for others out of love. This “laying down” of our lives can take many different forms: raising children; caring for an elderly parent; putting in an honest day’s work; doing small favors for a loved one; joining a prayer group; volunteering at a shelter; keeping abreast of current social and political issues; teaching religion; working in Outreach.

When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim intentions to become bread for the world. That’s what Jesus did on this night 2000 years ago. That’s what we do again today.

In a few moments, you and I will have the blood of the most famous person who ever lived coursing through our bodies. Let us offer fitting adoration of this “blood bond” by our willingness to be present to others in loving service so that as He “has done, we also must do.”

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