This is a big day for our first communicants. And the gospel we just heard helps us understand why. It speaks of a great miracle – Jesus feeding five thousand people with five small loaves of bread and two fish. Well, the point of this story isn’t just that Jesus fed a big crowd of people one day long ago. What John wants us to know by telling us this story is that, because of his great love for us, Jesus will give us all we need to complete our journey to his heavenly kingdom. The Eucharist is the special food and drink he gives us, to nourish us along the way. In the Eucharist Jesus gives himself to us as heavenly food. He gives himself to us in this way so we will know that he is with us and for us always. So the Eucharist is a wonderful thing. And receiving it is a privilege and a great blessing.

But sometimes things happen in life – bad things -- that cause us to wonder if God really does love us after all. For instance, when I was young we used to play baseball in an alley behind our house. One day, while we were playing, one of the kids from the neighborhood named Larry came out to show us his new guitar. Unfortunately, right when he came out into the alley I was batting and the pitcher pitched me the ball. I hit it really hard and then I heard a big CRACK, and the sound of wood splintering. That ball I hit had smashed in the back of Larry’s guitar. I felt terrible about it, but I’m sure he felt even worse. He was so happy to have gotten that guitar and then it was ruined just like that.

Bad things do happen, and sometimes they are way worse than what happened to Larry. And sometimes they happen to us! And we may find ourselves wondering: Where is God? If God loves us so much then why does he let such things happen? Well, my young friends, I have to be honest with you. I often find myself asking the same questions. And I definitely don’t have all the answers to them.

But as you prepare to receive your First Communion, I want to share one thing with you that I hope you will remember. That one thing is this: it is really important that, after receiving Holy Communion today, you continue to make it a regular part of your life. Now I realize that compared to some of the other things you could be doing, coming to Mass may not always be at the top of your list in terms of exciting things to do. And I can understand how you could feel this way.

So why go? Well, think of this. I know a child who was so sick that he had to be in the hospital for a few days. He was afraid, being in a strange place, being looked after by people he didn’t know, and feeling so sick that he thought he might die. Well, what really helped him through this was that his parents and his brother and sister came to be with him. They sat in his room for hours, to support and encourage him – to let him know how much he meant to them, and that they were with him all the way. Well, I have to tell you that sitting in that hospital room for all those hours wasn’t on his family’s list of most exciting things to do. But they did it anyway because they knew he needed them to be there with him.

Now, I’m not meaning to say that being at Mass is as bad as being in the hospital – although I know that it may seem like it at times. But, like that family I just mentioned, sometimes we do things in life not because we feel we need to, but because others need us to. And others do need us to be here. Your priest definitely needs you to be here. He has dedicated himself to serving God’s people. He needs to know that it really matters. Perhaps he’s never told you, but your presence at Mass, and your friendly greeting when you leave Mass really helps to keep his spirits up.
And I know that your presence at Mass is really important to some of the older members of our church family. They are afraid that the church they love may be dying. They are worried that young people no longer care about the church. You should see the smiles on their faces when they see you and your friends at Mass. It means much to them. I also know that some of your friends need you to be at Mass. I don’t have to tell you how hard it is for them to come to Mass at times. Sometimes their friends tell them that they think it’s stupid for them to have to go to Mass every Sunday. So when they see you at Mass it really helps them to hang in there and to do what they know is right.

And, believe it or not, Jesus really needs you to come to Mass. Since he is no longer visibly present in the world, he needs us to be his witnesses. Coming to Mass each week is one of the greatest witnesses you can make to those around you. What you are saying to them without even speaking a word is that Jesus is alive and that he can make a difference in people’s lives. I know that you are just one person, and what you do probably doesn’t seem to matter much. But the more “just one persons” that gather for Mass, the more powerful the witness is. Jesus needs you to be here.

And the truth is that, even though you may not think so at times, you need to be here. I know that much of what is said about the love of God that has been made known to us in Jesus, may not seem to have much to do with your life now. But you need to keep hearing these things, because there will come a day when they are going to matter more than anything else you have ever heard. Maybe a loved one will die suddenly; a friend will abandon you; your possessions will be lost to wind, fire, or flood; or you will become seriously ill yourself.

In those times, when everything you once thought was so important has been lost, and you realize that there is absolutely nothing you can do about it -- knowing that God loves you so much that he gives himself to you as a little bit of bread and a little sip of wine each week will matter more than anything. During those difficult times, in this special gift of God’s love, you will find the strength you need to carry on, because if God loves you enough to give himself to you in this way, you can trust that all will be well.

So my young friends, please set aside a little time each week for Mass, because there will come a day, maybe sooner than you think, when the words you hear will speak to your heart, and the Holy Communion in which you share will open you to the loving presence of Christ. And it will make all the difference in the world.

Fr. Rod Damico
May 7, 2016