

The White Round Sign of Love!

I think **most everyone** would agree that **weather-wise ... Friday, Saturday and today** are absolutely beautiful days ... with a **sunny blue sky** without a cloud present, a **mild temperature of 75** and a **light breeze** from the north.

Friday night and Saturday night were also very beautiful with **clear skies** presenting us with a **striking view of the Moon and all the Stars**.

Take time **tonight** to look up and admire **the Full Moon** that should be visible once again.

You know, **Moonlit skies** can be very romantic, especially if you're at **the Beach** and get to see the Moon come up over the horizon and reflect on the water or if you're up in the mountains away from the lights of the city and see it glow so bright.

It reminds me of a **young man and woman** up in **Chicago** who fell in love ... and used to go out at night and hold hands and enjoy moonlit sky ... whether ice-skating on a pond in winter or walking along Lake Michigan in the summer.

The moon was a **beautiful sign** of their love and affection for each other ... they were **united** in enjoying that beautiful sight together.

Now **the young man** had a **job** that required him to travel a good bit on business and he'd frequently be gone during the week, **hundreds of miles** away from home.

So on many clear nights, he'd call his girlfriend at night and ask her to go out on her deck and look up at the Moon and she'd say, "I see it too ... it's beautiful!"

And **he** would tell her how happy he was to know ... that **even though** they were **hundreds of miles apart** ...they were **united** by gazing upon the Moon.

Yes, that **little round white image** in the sky ... was something that united them ... **in love**.

Well, **there's something else** that's **little and round and white** that unites people in love ... and that's ... **the Holy Eucharist**.

You know, **God's desire** for **all His children on earth** ... is to be united in love.

And the sign that He chose is much more than **an inanimate object** in the heavens ...

it's nothing less than **the true presence** of His **Divine Son Jesus** ... veiled under the appearance of a **small round white piece of unleavened bread**.

Once consecrated, the small round white pieces of bread become the **Living Lord ... the Body and Blood of His Divine Son ... our Savior, Jesus Christ.**

So **the Eucharist** is not just a symbol ... but an efficacious sign ... a life-giving Sacrament ... which is nothing less than the **power and presence of God!**

Yesterday, at the **Cathedral of St. Paul**, (**Eighteen**) **2nd Graders** from **St. Rose Academy** and **St. Paul PSR** received their **First Holy Communion**.

How **happy & pious & excited** they were ... to be receiving Jesus for the first time.

Today, (**six**) children from **St. Henry** parish and (**five**) children from **St. Elizabeth Ann Seton** parish will receive their First Holy Communion!

We can see that they too are **happy and pious and excited!**

Thanks to **the training** they received from **their parents** and **their PSR Teachers...** they know that they're receiving way more than a little white circle of bread.

It's Jesus ...who is God!

To the degree that a **2nd Grader** can comprehend that, they'll affirm their belief in the **mystery of the Hidden Jesus** as they said "**Amen**" before receiving the Eucharist.

And how about you ... who've received the Eucharist ... hundreds and perhaps thousands of times ... appreciate what you are receiving?

Has **your comprehension and appreciation** increased over the years to the degree that you delight in receiving Holy Communion more than ever before?

Are you **happy and pious and excited** to be here and **now just minutes away from receiving Jesus** in Holy Communion?

Or has **Communion** become **routine and mechanical?**

Do you understand ... that **in the Eucharist** you're receiving God?

You know, those **two lovers**, who enjoyed looking at the Moon ... **what did they see?**

Like all of us ... they saw the Moon as just a tiny dot in the sky ...
when in reality the Moon measures 2, 200 miles in diameter!

Yes ... **while the Moon appears small** ... it's huge ...
it's almost as wide as the entire United States of America! ...
it's $\frac{1}{4}$ **the size of the Earth!**

So the Moon ...

is way bigger than it appears ... way bigger than you could ever imagine.

In just the same way, **the Eucharist** is way bigger than it appears ...

for in **each little 1” diameter Host** ... is **the true presence of the infinite God!**

So what you’re receiving in the Eucharist is way more than you could ever imagine.

While the Moon is pleasing, illuminating and uniting ...

The Eucharist is all of that and more ... it is **life-giving!**

The Eucharist is Jesus ... and Jesus is Life.

When we receive **Jesus** ... we receive **life ... divine life** ... for our souls.

To help us understand this, **Jesus** gives us another **powerful image**.

Remember **the image** Jesus gave us **last week** of Himself ... saying ...

I am the **Good Shepherd**

And we contemplated how wonderful that image is ...

that **we have a God** who shepherds us ... who loves us, guides us, guards us and picks us up and carries us home when we get lost or separated.

Well in our **Gospel** today, **Jesus** gives us a new image ...

He refers to Himself as ... **the Vine** ...

and He refers to us as ... **the Branches**.

He says, “*I am the vine and you are the branches.*”

He wants us to understand how important it is to stay connected to Him.

Whether you’re an adult who does yard work or a **child**, who picks a little clover or dandelion for Mom,

you know what happens to the **grass** or the **flowers** as soon as you cut or pick them.

They begin to die and in no time at all ... **they are dead**.

Why? Because they were cut off from the main body of the plant ...

and **with no way to get nourishment** ... they cease to live.

And once they’re dead, they’re **good for nothing** but to be disposed of.

You know **the chore** you have **each fall** to rake up the leaves that have fallen off of your trees. They’re **dead** ... **so you rake them into a pile** and burn them.

Jesus says **the same fate** awaits **those** who fall away from **connection with God**.
Once you're no longer connected to the **source of Divine life**,
you no longer get the **nourishment** you need to live.

Every person who tries to live apart from **Jesus** will die.
Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. **Jesus** sustains us with **His Holy Spirit**.

If we separate ourselves from the **source of our nourishment**, we will die.

Jesus says, “*Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned.*”

And that brings up the **image of Hell** ... where **those** who have freely broken away from **the love and mercy of God** will suffer in fire for all eternity.

Today **Jesus** says,
“*Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.*”

None of us want to die.

No, we want to live ... **not just** in this life, **but** in eternal life.

So how do we do this?

We stay attached to **the vine** ...

so that **we** the branches are one with **Jesus** the vine!

You know the most intimate expression of love that we have on earth is in the marital act where the **husband and wife** are united as one flesh ... the **two become one**.

Our Lord desires this level of intimacy with us, which is **why** He established the **miracle** whereby we can actually take **Him** into our body in **Holy Communion**.
God and **man** ... in the most intimate encounter ... the **two become one**.

There is nothing more precious than **this encounter** with **the Risen Lord** ...
where He comes **not only** to be with us ... **but** to be in us!

Jesus didn't say “remain with me”. **No**, he says “remain in me”!

Listen to **the words** Jesus used in our **Gospel** today. ... **Read them!**

In the **8 verses** of the **John's Gospel** proclaimed today,

Jesus expresses His desire for us to remain in Him and He in us **8 times!**

There's a **big difference** between saying ... remain **with** me and ... remain **in** me.

Today, our Second Graders will have Jesus ... not just **with them ... but **in** them ...
for the very first time!**

Hopefully this will be **the first of countless unions with Jesus!**

By receiving **Jesus** worthily in Holy Communion ...
we're doing exactly what Jesus commanded us to do.

Recall **how Jesus said in John 6,**

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

That's **the union** that **God** desires ... where **He** gets to remain in us and we in Him.
That's **the union** that's far more intimate than looking at the moon.

St. John speaks to this in our **Second Reading** today saying,

"Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them."

In order to live ... we must stay connected to the vine.

Apart from the vine we die.

Jesus' warns us today saying, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

Let's stay connected to Jesus, the source of life, remaining in Him and He in us.

We do this by continuing to receive Him worthily in Holy Communion.

Just as those two lovers ... though hundreds of miles apart ...

were united by looking upon the same Moon.

All of us remain united by looking upon & receiving the same Jesus in the Eucharist!

Dennis Krantz just got back from a business trip to **Pittsburgh** Penn. and he told me of the great beauty of the **160 yr.-old church** and how everything was the same ... just like it is at **St. Elizabeth Ann Seton** in Gardendale!

Yes, in every Catholic Church around the world it's always the same Jesus that comes to us in **the Eucharist!**

You know if Dennis and I were on the phone last Sunday, I could say to him ...

"I can't see you ... but I know you're looking at ... it's exactly what I'm looking at.

It's Jesus the Bread of Life ... and just knowing that ... fills me with great joy!

Through the moon ... we're united in a symbolic way ...

Through the Eucharist ... we're united in a very real way. We are one in Him!

After our children receive their **First Holy Communion,**
you'll hear **our Cantor** sing the beautiful song, ***Come do this in memory of Me!***

The words are simple ... yet so meaningful as they reveal the **mystery of God's love**.

Here are **a few of the verses** for your contemplation:

Come do this in Memory of Me

by John Burland

*This is my body that's broken for you; come do this in memory of me.
This is my blood that's been given for you; come do this in memory of me.*

*To my table you will come and share this meal that makes us one,
This gift of love I leave always to you.*

*In the blessing of this bread, in the blessing of this wine,
remember me, my life poured out for you.*

Gather as one and remember I'm near, come do this in memory of me.