

In March of 1987, Fr. Pete Schineller, a Jesuit priest returned from a 5 year mission to Africa. He wrote an informative article for America magazine on the state of the Catholic church in Africa and he used the African nation of Nigeria as his focal point. Two words that he used over and over again in his article were: Vibrant and Enthusiastic.

He used as an example the small, poor parish of St. James. Even though the parish was strapped for money, they still managed to bring together large crowds for the Sunday Eucharist. In a tree next to the church there hung a rim from an old truck tire. 15 minutes before mass, someone would bang on that rim with a piece of pipe. With the help of this makeshift bell the call would go forth that the Eucharist would be starting. It was a reminder that Christ would be coming to their community; their poor struggling community. Within minutes the people, hundreds of them would gather for the celebration of the Eucharist.

Father Pete also used in his article a segment of a letter written by a local bishop to his people. The segment of the letter that Fr. Pete used is appropriate for us because it talks about the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, the feast that our church

celebrates this week end.

The African bishop writes, “Yesterday was Corpus Christi procession day in Harcourt, Nigeria. The Lord sent rain. All along the two mile route the people danced and sang in the rain....It was the first time I recall the Blessed Sacrament being carried into the place of benediction to the sound of resounding cheers and clapping. Everyone was drenched. No one thought of seeking shelter or running away. Judges, lawyers, doctors, mothers and children all stood their ground as if the only thing happening was the Eucharist. I have not seen anything like it before, here or anywhere else.” That day the presence of Christ in the midst of that community freed the people enough that they could dance in the rain.

I love this story because in a real way it shows the power of the Eucharist in our lives. People who had nothing in the way of wealth or possessions and people who had titles and positions of importance were able to come together and celebrate their common roots in the Body and Blood of Christ.

As I look around this church today and I see the variety of people that have gathered I am in awe at the incredible unifying

presence of Christ that is in our midst. God is in this house and he is calling us to the table to share in his sacred Body and sacred Blood.

The question is how well do we respond to this call? Are we able to open ourselves to the nourishment that awaits us at this table? This encounter that we have with God is so vital to our faith life. When the people of Jesus' time were invited to share a meal with someone it was sign of forgiveness and acceptance. A shared table meant a shared life. In such a setting, it is impossible to overestimate the impact of Jesus' meals with the poor and the sinners. By sitting at table with the ragtag group of tax collectors, prostitutes, drunks and other social misfits Jesus accepts them as friends and equals. Jesus wipes away all humiliation, shame, and guilt. Jesus demonstrates to all of us who hunger for him that he desires to gather us at his table. By his personal presence, Jesus gives a sense of dignity to all people and shows that we matter to him.

When we come forward today and extend our hands to receive The Body and the Blood we are sharing in the personal presence of Jesus given for us and given to us. It is a grace filled gift that

commands our attention and our respect. When the Church asks people to consider how they dress for mass or the time they arrive at or leave the mass it is not meant to shame people but to direct their attention to the priceless gift they are about to receive.

Because we receive the Eucharist on such a regular basis it is necessary to remind people of the importance of the moment and what can be done to make the moment special. When we arrive at mass it is important for us to take time to slow down and prepare for the mass. Otherwise it becomes just another event that we have to go to. The Eucharist is far from just another event. It is THE EVENT that energizes us to live the gospel every day of our life. Receiving The Body and Blood of Christ every week will allow us to face our fears, our doubts, our limitations and will encourage us to dance in the rain.