

The other night I was driving home and saw a sign posted on the lawn of a church that was not Catholic. The sign was an invitation to come on Holy Thursday for a live re-enactment of The Last Supper. I laughed when I read it and thought to myself – we have that every Mass!

By the time I reached my garage, I had done a theology double check and realized I had been wrong on this point. We do not have a re-enactment of the Lord's Supper, or indeed a re-enactment of anything in the Catholic Church. What we have is Sacraments, Symbols and Signs.

Simply put, a sign points us to something bigger. The Sign of the Cross, links us, in this simple movement, to the death and resurrection of Jesus AND to the truth of the Triune God – Father Son and Holy Spirit. Signs are abundant and can be seen in art and music and in nature. Signs are all around us.

Symbols, are a bit more complicated. They point to a greater reality than a sign might. Symbols bring us closer to truths. Water, in our context of Faith, symbolizes Baptism, more particularly, the cleansing power of Baptism. Fire or Doves point to the Holy Spirit but they might also lead us to the ideas of zeal and peace.

A sign and a symbol might be used together. The sign of the cross after we have wet our fingers with Holy Water recall our Baptism into the life of the Church and into the grace of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit whom we invoke.

Sacraments are far more important than symbols or signs – BUT – they use sign and symbol to do an amazing thing! They make real and present what the symbols or signs point to. In Baptism, water does not just symbolize cleansing – it is cleansing. The Sacrament washes away all traces of sin! That's not pious wishing – that's fact! The oil used in Confirmation, Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick is more than a symbol of sealing, sanctifying and salvation. Sacrament seals the Confirmed with the Holy Spirit – it's not an exchange of pleasantries and a dab of oil. With the Words "Be Sealed With the Holy Spirit" and the

smearing of oil on the head of the one being Confirmed, that person is indeed and in all truth “Sealed with the Holy Spirit”.

The Ordained is called from the Baptized and sanctified, that is, “set apart” for a different life because they are fundamentally, ontologically different. The married persons, by the exchange of symbols, rings, and the vows they make to one another truly are one flesh. The Eucharist makes real and present the Body and Blood of Jesus. Bread and wine are no longer symbols, they are Jesus Christ Crucified and Risen!

Sign, symbol and Sacrament to a Catholic tell us that what we do when we gather here is never a re-enactment. It is a re-calling, a re-living, a remembering, a re-calling, but never a re-enacting.

The Easter Triduum, the three days, this night we call Holy Thursday, tomorrow, which is Good Friday and the Easter Vigil are one event. They are a continuum. We began this Mass in the usual way, but you will not be sent forth, that is, dismissed until Easter. This Holy time is filled and steeped in Sacrament, symbol and sign. Incense, bells, white garments, water, wine, bread, oil, flames, the wood of the cross – nothing is left out and our senses are nearly overwhelmed.

Tonight , we make present again the upper room – not a re-enactment. That would require Father to wear a beard and a wig and sandals. Rather, what he wears is the stole, the symbol of his office, a priest by the grace of the great high priest – Jesus.

Tonight we commemorate the institution of the Eucharist and the institution of the priesthood, a sacrament of dying to one’s self to live and SERVE others as Jesus does. So the washing of feet is more than the dramatic telling of a story, it is a rich symbol of deep commitment and service and, above all, love.

In preparing this homily, I was tempted to feel a little smug when I recalled the sign in front of that Church. What we have is richer, and truer and more beautiful than a costumed play could ever hope to be.

We have been given so very much, and so much more is asked of us.

I cannot feel smug. What I should feel is sorrow, sorrow that so many of my brothers and sisters in Christ have only one or two of the Sacraments while I have seven.

Why should this matter?

Living a Sacramental life equips us for the fight for heaven and for our battles with sin. The Sacramental life is an assurance of God's graces sown among us.

The Sacramental life is grace upon grace for the journey to God.

I am saddened that the reality of the body and blood of Jesus cannot yet be shared with our separated brethren, that the surety of forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is ours and not theirs.

But it was not always this way. There was a time when the Church of Jesus Christ was united, one faith, one hope, one God, one Spirit as St. Paul tells us.

And it can be that way again. That was Jesus' prayer, that his followers remain one in Him as He is in the Father.

The Triduum is a celebration of nearly all that we have been given in Christ. It is the highest and most holy of all our days. It is a time of great solemnity tonight and sadness tomorrow. It is also a time of inexpressible joy at the resurrection.

But it can never be a source of pride and satisfaction so long as it can only be possessed by you and I but not our neighbors, our co-workers and so many others.