

“DO this ...in memory of me!”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once upon a time, a little boy of about 4 years old wanted to become a cowboy. After a year or so, he dropped that ambition and decided he wanted to become, instead, a priest. A lofty ‘leap,’ indeed! In the 8th grade, still wanting to become a priest, he announced his intention to his parents. His mother was very thrilled; his father was very skeptical. Regardless, that Fall, he awoke on the first day of school ...in a seminary.

Every morning, for the following 12 seminary-years, when he knelt in chapel, before daily Mass, he’d stare down at his hands and ask God if they were the hands of a priest. Then, one morning when he awoke & stared at his hands, he got his answer. It was, “Yes.” They **were** the hands of a priest, for he had been ordained the day before and this day, he would say his **First Mass!**

The hands of which I speak are ...these, for the boy of whom I spoke ...is me.

On this night, some 2,000 years ago, Jesus gave us the Eucharist, the Priesthood, and the great Mandatum. The great mandate was to ‘serve one another,’ as he did (serve others) all his life, symbolized by his washing his apostles’ feet.

On this night, the night of the Lord’s Supper, he not only gave us the Eucharist in Communion, but he gave us the Priesthood in Holy Orders. He did this when he commanded his apostles to do exactly as he had just done: change mere bread and wine into his precious body & blood. He said, “This IS my body –this IS my blood. You DO this in memory of me.” He didn’t say, “This is LIKE my body...this is LIKE my blood.” He said, “This IS my body; this IS my blood.” He didn’t invite them to follow his example. He commanded them. He said, “DO this in memory of me!”

*Now, I could take this hand-held mic, walk through the congregation, and ask you what **you** think of Communion; ask how different your world would be without the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith. BUT, lest I make you feel uncomfortable at the pressure this might bear upon you, I thought I’d be a bit personal tonight, and tell you what I think of the Eucharist, especially as a priest, the one who, with the grace of Almighty God, **creates** the Eucharist.*

Many have asked over the years,

“Why is Tusky so-o-o dramatic, especially when it comes to the Consecration of the Mass? Doesn’t he know that, at times, he scares little kids with the way ‘he does it?’ Why does he have to sing it...just to be different?”—you ask?

I am glad you asked those questions! So, let me try to explain.

*The answers, I guess, have to do with the realization of what I am actually doing and my deep sense of unworthiness. I can’t forget who I am or where I came from. I’m just that kid from Overbrook, who, one day, stopped wanting to be a cowboy and started wanting to be a priest. Every time I say Mass, I am overwhelmed at what I am about to do. With these hands –hands with which I have hit people, hands that have shoveled sludge in the cellars of the steel mills, hands that have unplugged toilets, hands that I have placed... where they did not belong –with these very, same hands, **I** will change bread to God! It is almost too much to bear. I grasp that chalice and I feel like I am holding the whole world between my fingers. I peer down into the chalice and I see wars, rapes, murders, beheadings, abortions, abuses of all sorts, and then ...on the surface of that ‘liquid-about-to-become God’ ...I see my own face, reflected –looking back at me. And I am one of them ...a sinner, too. It’s almost too much to bear ---ev-e-ry time!*

Then, slowly, I lift the chalice as high as I can, so that everybody in the church can 'see' ...and I offer Jesus back to the Father –for all mankind. Me... Rick Tusky, that kid from Overbrook, am making possible... **'Atonement for the sins of humanity.'** I feel, in a way, like Atlas ...holding up the whole world. And in those few moments, I realize that **I** am the... **'Captor of His blood,'** as though I were holding the chalice to His open side. I **see** it happening. It is the very blood that will become our Communion...the **'Sacrifice'** that will become **'Sacrament.'** Also, in those brief moments, **I** am the **'Crucifier of His body,'** for **my** sins... are sins for which He had to die.

All 'this' swirls through my mind as I am holding up that chalice. Sometimes I see the ceiling of the church in the background of the elevated chalice; sometimes I see the blackened universe with distant planets and stars. My back, often, has spasms; my breathing is always constricted. When I lower the chalice, at times, I do not know where I am. I keep the Mass book handy, even though I have it all memorized, so I can 'fuss' with it if I've 'gone too far,' that is, so I can buy myself time to re-orient myself and get back to the Mass ...to this church and the people present.

A question often asked is: why did I ever start singing **it**... the Consecration?
The answer is: I don't know.

I never thought about it. I never read about it. I never planned it. I never rehearsed it.

The first time **it** happened, singing the Consecration, was at the first Mass I said at my first assignment –at St. George's, up in Allentown, between Mt. Washington and Mt. Oliver. It was in May of 1973. I remember it like it was yesterday.

It was a Monday morning. There were only a few old women, dressed, mostly in black, with their black chapel-veils on their heads. My **'First Mass'** was 'over' and the crowds were gone. No family or friends; no fanfare; no choirs; no concelebrants to help me get through it. It came time for the Consecration –and **it** happened, it just ...**came out**. It was as though 12 years of seminary life simply exploded: 12 years of waiting and dreaming; 12 years of tests & exams; 12 years of strict discipline & obedience; 12 years of that haunting question about my hands: "Was I or wasn't I" --to be a priest. It **ALL...** just... came... out! And ...you know what the best part is? It still does! It **still** takes my breath away. It's **still**, almost... too much to bear.

So, there you have it. That's the way **I** look at ...the source and summit of our faith –the Eucharist! I hope, in this little, 'expos'e of-self,' I will be a little less confusing or mysterious. I just feel very lucky to be here with Fr. Boyle and to be a priest of this parish –your 'parish-family' priest!

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Before I re-enact his original 'Mandatum' and wash the 12 parishioners' feet, who so bravely and humbly have accepted my request to represent the 12 apostles tonight, I, 1st want to renew my priestly vows before you... the anniversary of the 1st Ordination class.

(Now, the renewal of my priestly vows follow.)

RENEWAL OF PRIESTLY PROMISES

*On the anniversary of that day when Christ our Lord conferred his priesthood on his Apostles, I... **Richard Joseph Tusky**, hereby resolve to renew, in your presence, God's holy people, the promises I made nearly forty-three years ago, on May 5, 1973:*

I am resolved... *to be more united with the Lord Jesus and more closely conformed to him, denying myself and confirming those promises about sacred duties towards Christ's Church which, prompted by love of him, I willingly and joyfully pledged on the day of my priestly ordination.*

I am resolved... *to be a faithful steward of the mysteries of God in the Holy Eucharist & other liturgical rites and to discharge, faithfully, the sacred office of teaching, following Christ the Head and Shepherd, not seeking any gain, but moved only by zeal for souls.*

My dearest brothers & sisters, pray for your priests, that the Lord may pour out his gifts abundantly upon them and keep them faithful as ministers of Christ, the High Priest, so they may lead you to him, who is the source of salvation.

Also... pray, especially, for me... that I may be faithful to the office of priesthood entrusted to me in my lowliness and, that in your midst, I may be made, day by day, a living and more perfect image of Christ... the Priest, the Good Shepherd, the Teacher & Servant of all.

May the Lord keep us all in his charity and lead all of us, shepherds & flock, to eternal life.

Amen.