

“You Ought to Wash One Another’s Feet!”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once upon a time, when I was just a kid, even before I entered St. Norbert Grade School in Overbrook, I started wanting to be a priest. I don’t quite understand how that could have happened, especially to a kid like me... I was ‘normal.’ I had no logical reason to want to be a priest. My parents came from large families—my mom was one of 9 and my dad was one of 21! Among that huge tribe, there were NO priests, nuns, or brothers...no aunts, uncles, or 100’s of cousins that had the ‘calling.’ No one from the family tree was there to inspire me. I was it! — ‘no mas!’ My mother, of Irish heritage, was thrilled. My dad, of Polish extract, was skeptical.

Looking back, I now see I made a terribly dumb decision **not** to tell the nuns at school. When I finally ‘*came out*’ after an 8th grade ‘Vocation Talk’ by a Franciscan priest... the nuns treated me like gold! On Fridays, they gave me bus-money to go up Maytide Street to Brownsville Rd, and take a short walk to the Passionist Convent on Stewart Avenue to pick up the hosts for the weekend—best part?— during Lent, I got out of Friday Stations! Like I said I was ‘*normal*.’

So, right out of 8th grade, in the Fall of 1960, I woke up in a 48-man dorm at St. Fidelis Seminary in Herman, PA, 5 mls. out of Butler—run by Capuchin-Franciscan priests.

At first, it was a spooky, medieval kind of place with all sorts of medieval-like rules. It was all very ‘strange.’ We were up at 5:30 in the morning—‘lights out’ at 9 pm, we had no money, no radio, no TV, we weren’t allowed off the grounds, our parents visited once a month (*weather permitting*), we had school 6 days a week. It was a virtual Boot Camp for, very young, priest ‘want-a-be’s.’ Defection rate was tremendous: out of 113 guys, 2 of us got ordained for Pgh. The other guy, a good friend to this day, left after 5 years (*from St. Norbert’s-of all places!*). Nevertheless, believe it or not, I came to cherish my time at St. Fidelis!

After 6 years at Fidelis, I graduated from there and moved onto the next, 6 year, TOR- Franciscan-run seminary in Loretto, PA, 5 mls. out of Ebensburg, PA. Now, at last, completing my last 2 years of college on the student campus-finishing a degree in philosophy, there were **girls** in the classroom! Like I said, I was ‘*normal*.’ Those 2 years were a delight. But then, the last 4 years, working on a Masters of Divinity Degree in Theology, were spent on the seminary grounds. So sad; ‘*Good bye, girls. It was nice while it lasted.*’

I needed to give you some of this personal background, which will make sense momentarily.

On this night, some 2,000 years ago, Jesus gave us the Eucharist, the Priesthood, and the Great Mandatum. The Great Mandatum, 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 Mass 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 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, I thought I’d be a bit personal tonight, hence my background, 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 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, at the age of 5, stopped wanting to be a cowboy and started wanting to be a priest.

You see, 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** 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, saran-gas-bombs, 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 it’ ...and I offer Jesus back to the Father –for all mankind. Me... Rick Tusky, that kid from St. Norbert’s in 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 on the cross. I **see** it happening. It is the very blood that will become our Communion...the **‘Sacrifice’** that will become **‘Sacrament.’** In those brief moments, I am no longer just the **‘Captor of his blood,’** **I** am the **‘Crucifier of His body,’** for **my** sins... are the 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 host or chalice; sometimes I see the blackened universe with distant planets and stars. My back, often, has spasms; my breathing is always constricted. When I finally lower the chalice, which at times seems like an eternity, 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.

**As far as WHY did I ever start singing 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 very **'First Mass'** was 'over' and the crowds were gone. No family (w. aunts, uncles, and cousins from all over the US), no friends; no fanfare; no choirs; no concelebrants to prop me up. It came time for the Consecration –and **it** happened, it just ...**came out**. It was as though 12 years of medieval 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 (with so many of my classmates 'gone'): "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! What's going to happen with all that 'Church Alive' stuff...remains to be seen. All I know for sure, for now, is that you are stuck with me and I have you. That's all I care about.*

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

Before I re-enact his original 'Great Mandatum' and wash the 6 parishioners' feet, only 6 due to the size of the sanctuary, who so bravely and humbly have accepted my request to represent the apostles tonight, I, 1st want to renew my priestly vows before you... the anniversary of the very 1st Ordination class, 2,00 years ago.

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

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-four 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.