

Good morning everybody,

Well the prodigal son has returned and he was a little disappointed because the fatted calf wasn't killed for him. However, here we are.

A little story for you ... it's not really what you would call a vacation story; rather it's a pre-vacation story. It actually happened a week before I went on vacation and it happened in fairly sad circumstances. The pastor of Sacred Heart parish in New Smyrna Beach dropped dead of a heart attack, his name was Frank Brown and he was my age. He was a wonderful man and we pray he is truly at peace. Frank was an avid fisherman and everybody knew it; he loved to fish. In fact the day he died he was fishing, he actually died when he was out on his boat. A couple days later I was at his funeral service and the priest who was giving the homily talked a lot about Frank and told a lot of fishing stories regarding Frank. He said that Frank was a wonderful minister, that he reached out to all ages and all groups. In fact just a couple of weeks ago he had the kindergarten kids in the church and he was explaining to the kindergarten kids the different appointments in the church, such as, this is God's house, that's the lectern right there, that's the altar, there is Jesus on the cross who died for us and that's the tabernacle over there where Jesus lives. He concluded his little class and about a week later the kindergarten teacher had the same group of children back in the church and was rehashing what the priest told them. She asked them who's house is this- and they responded "This is God's house." What's this up here- "That's the altar." and so on... Then she said, "And where does Jesus live in this house." A little boy put up his hand and said, "Miss... he lives over there in Fr. Frank's gold tackle box."

So this morning for a couple of moments we reflect upon the 'golden tackle box' or what the golden tackle box represents. Of course we don't call it the 'golden tackle box, we normally refer to it as the tabernacle which you will always find in a Catholic church. In many ways it reminds us that we are different from other denominations because we have the tabernacle the tabernacle represents something more than itself. Rather it represents what we call 'the Real Presence', the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The fact that here at Mass when we use the words 'consecration', bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, we acknowledge that Eucharist is not just symbol, rather that it's the real thing. And if indeed it is, then it is a tremendous miracle on the one hand and tremendous mystery on the other. The Jesus that was born into the world 2000 years ago is the Jesus who will become present to us here on the altar every time we celebrate Mass. And it is that Jesus we receive into our hearts at communion time. That has been the teaching of the Catholic Church from the beginning right from the time the Church started. The Eucharist is integral, its central to who we are as Catholics. That belief in the Eucharist emerges through

the pages of scripture in a variety of place, especially in the New Testament. But perhaps the best description of Eucharist in the Scripture is what we call the famous Chapter 6 of St. John; John's Eucharistic discourse. If you have been attending Mass for the last five weeks, each Sunday we have had a section of chapter 6 and today was the concluding section. It presented a challenge to the people who were present to Jesus at that time and it also presents a challenge to us. Remember the beginning of the chapter was the story of the multiplication of the loaves where Jesus fed 5,000 with a few barley loaves and when he fed them, then controversy arose because we all like free food and they came after him again. So He said to them 'don't labor for the food which perishes, rather labor for the food that endures until life everlasting'. Using that as a backdrop then he talked to them about his presence in the Eucharist. He said, "I am the Bread of Life and unless you eat of the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you will have no life in you."

So there you have it in those words is the statement that Jesus is present in the Eucharist. That takes us right to today's reading which if you didn't know the background to the reading it wouldn't make much sense because at the very beginning of the reading today the followers of Jesus were saying how can anyone believe it. And if we were there we probably would have said the same words – this is a hard saying and how can anyone believe it. In other words, it doesn't make any sense to say that Jesus becomes present under the appearance of bread and wine. And so that leads to the fact in a couple of sentences down, we are told that many of his followers went back to their former way of life. They were unable to accept this great teaching on the Eucharist.

And so Jesus said to Peter and the boys, the ones who were very close to him, he said, "Folks, Pete, do you also want to leave?" Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." In essence Peter, along with his associates, were making an affirmation of their belief in the teaching of Jesus regarding the Eucharist.

So as we ponder this reality here this morning, perhaps the words of Jesus apply to us here today also. 'Do you also want to leave?' And I'm sure you would say "Of course I don't, that's why I'm here. I'm here because I believe –because I believe in the Eucharist." But the real question is this, is our belief in the Eucharist what we call a 'head' belief or is it 'heart' belief. Do we say yes to Jesus just in our heads or do we say yes to Jesus in the presence of the Eucharist right here in our hearts? Because I think at the end of the day the key is to accept the Eucharist in your heart. I think that if you accept Eucharist in your heart, then you come to church on Sunday not out of obligation, you come out of a deep love; a deep reverence. If you accept Jesus the Eucharist in your heart, then when you come into the church, you are not going to engage yourself in idle chatter, but rather you are going to get busy about reflection and prayer. If you accept Jesus the Eucharist in your heart, I think you work very hard at being attentive at Mass. If you really accept the Eucharist in your heart, then I think

you would probably drop into the church for a visit at other times than Mass times. And finally, if you accept the reality of the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist in your heart, then you will not just **receive** Eucharist, rather you will attempt to **be** Eucharist to other people. You will be deeply concerned with the needs of others, especially with the struggling people of the world because those are the ones that really deeply concerned Jesus during the course of his earthly existence. Amen