

First Holy Communion – May 6, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 10:00am Mass – 775 words

It is my pleasure to welcome all our First Communicants, their families, and friends here to this special Mass today. This is a very important day for our dear children who have been preparing to receive Jesus sacramentally. You have prepared through study and prayer. You have also received the sacrament of Confession so that your souls could be cleansed and so be a fitting dwelling for the Lord. Now you are ready to receive his Body and Blood under the appearances of bread and wine. You know that it's not bread and wine at all; no, after the priest says the words of consecration, it truly and really is the Body and Blood of Christ. And he invites you to share in his banquet from this day forward.

Dear children, after you have received Jesus in Holy Communion, what will you say to him? Will you pray for your family and friends? Will you pray for your school work? Will you pray for peace in our world? I'm sure that you will think of a lot of these things. But there is something else that you should say to Jesus: "thank you". Give him thanks for sharing himself with you in this way. Give him thanks for your family and your friends. Give him thanks for your Catholic faith and our wonderful parish. There are always many things to thank God for. I hope that you will thank him today when you receive him – and that you will always do that whenever you receive him.

This is what our Blessed Mother teaches us. She received Jesus in a very unique way. The archangel Gabriel came to her and told her that she would become the mother of Christ. And she said yes to the angel's invitation. Mary always said yes to God; she always wanted to do his will. And at that very moment she became pregnant with Jesus. He was inside her body and she carried him around for those nine months until he was born into our world. One of the first things she did after she became pregnant with Jesus, as we just heard in the gospel, was to go and see her relative, Elizabeth. And the words that she spoke were words of thanksgiving and praise: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord... he has looked with favor on his lowly servant."

Jesus has looked with favor upon each and every one of you. He has chosen you to be here today and he has a wonderful plan for the rest of your life. Whenever you receive Holy Communion is a good time to talk to him about that plan. Ask him for his help. Tell him that you'll do whatever he wants. Ask him to guide you and show you the way. Learn to speak to Jesus just like you speak to your friends – with love and familiarity – each time you receive Holy Communion. We can always talk to God, anywhere we might be. But when we receive Holy Communion, he is very close to us and it is a very special time for us to pray.

A word for the parents here present. Thank you for bringing your child to this day. You are their primary educators and have desired this for them and sought the necessary help to make it happen. But your work does not stop now. No, besides the sacrament of confirmation that they will receive in a few years, there is their whole lifetime for which you are helping to prepare. Commend them to God and offer them to him. "Whatever you want, Lord, is good enough for me!" is a great prayer. If you're not sure that you can say that prayer and mean it, then start with, "Lord, help me to want what you want!" God's will for your children is what will make them truly happy. Encourage them to seek his will above all things.

And be a model for them of living faith. For the faith to stay alive it must be nourished. When your children see you praying, going to confession, making fervent and devout communions, and showing charity to others, they will learn far more from those actions than from many words. We all have a role to play in this regard. Let us pray for a deeper faith, especially in the Real Presence of Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist. He is really and truly present on our altars

and in our tabernacles, always waiting for us and desiring to give himself fully to us. If we give ourselves to him, we will never be disappointed.