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“I will raise the cup of salvation.” Psalm 115:13

Exordium:

Are you planning to receive Holy Communion today? If so, when you approach the altar, what will you see? What will you be thinking? What will you be holding in your hearts? My dear friends, these questions are of the utmost importance today, because we celebrate Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. On this day we rejoice in our most precious sacrament – the Eucharist – which Jesus gave us at the Last Supper, as we just heard in the Gospel according to St. Mark. The Eucharist is the most precious sacrament, the most august sacrament, because in it Jesus is really and truly present. Testimony to this fact is given by the demons and the saints alike. According to the exorcists – the exorcists of our very own day – when the Eucharist is brought into the presence of the possessed, the demons *shriek*. The saints also bear witness, albeit more eloquently. For instance, Justin Martyr says: “The Eucharist *is* the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus.” The saints of the early church are unanimous in this conviction. In the face of so profound a mystery, how should we approach Holy Communion?

Narratio:

The cantor has given us a lead. During the psalm meditation, he sang some beautiful words: “The cup of salvation I will raise.” These words are special because Jesus and his disciples would have prayed those same words at the end of the Last Supper. “I will raise the cup of salvation.” These words come from one of the so-called Hallel psalms that would have been sung at the end of the Passover meal. So at the Last Supper Jesus and his disciples would have chanted: “I will raise the cup of salvation.” Thus, there is a link between these words and today’s Gospel. Let’s fill these words with the Gospel. Let’s pour the Gospel into the cup.

Propositio:

What we will discover is that Holy Communion is like the Last Supper, because they both use the same cup, the one cup of salvation.

Partitio:

So let’s consider the cup of salvation in both its moments: at the Last Supper and at Holy



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Communion during the Mass.

Confirmatio:

At the Last Supper Jesus himself prays: “I will raise the cup of salvation.” He prays this not only at the end of the meal but also during the meal. St. Mark says: “[Jesus] took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.” Jesus took *a* cup. There was only *one* cup. In those days at a Passover meal, that cup would actually have been a chalice. That is, a large cup with two handles, so that it could be passed around the table, each disciple taking a drink in turn. This manner of sharing symbolized their friendship and intimacy, the friendship of Jesus with the disciples and the disciples with one another. According to Jewish custom, the cup would have contained wine. The blessing would have begun with a standard Jewish prayer formula: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God.” Jesus of course would have directed these words to his Father in Heaven. But then Jesus alters the usual blessing. According to St. Mark, Jesus says: “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be poured out for many.” Jesus is obviously speaking about his own Passion, in which he would spill his precious blood for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, the cup that he took and blessed was the cup of salvation. At the end of the meal when the Hallel psalms were sung, Jesus would have chanted: “I will raise the cup of salvation.” He would have meant it in a unique way: namely, that he would allow himself to be raised up on the Cross. His body, the vessel of his body, would weep its precious blood. In icons of the crucifix, you sometimes see angels holding chalices beneath Jesus’ hands and feet and side to catch every drop of his precious Blood.

Now let’s consider today’s Mass. Who is it that says: “I will raise the cup of salvation”? It’s all: the ordained priests and non-ordained priests. The ordained priest raises the cup of salvation in the way that Jesus Christ the High Priest did. The cup looks somewhat different, though. Our chalice is made of precious metal, gold or silver, and perhaps inlaid with precious stones. It’s a piece of art. And it’s a blessed object, consecrated for its holy purpose. The priest handles the cup with his sacred hands, the hands that were anointed with chrism at his ordination. He cradles the cup with wine and blesses it by repeating Jesus’ words: “This is my blood.” Then the priest raises the cup, offering it to the Father. So you see, the priest acts on Jesus’ behalf to make his sacrifice present on the altar in *this* time and in *this* place. The very same sacrifice that was prefigured at the Last Supper and that was enacted at Calvary is made present *here*.

So how about the non-ordained priests? How do they raise the cup of salvation? They raise the cup of salvation *with* the priest. By virtue of their baptism, they belong to the common priesthood of believers and so also have a share in Christ’s Priesthood. They offer his sacrifice in mind and heart along with the priest. They intend it. Then at Communion when they drink from the chalice, they literally raise the cup of salvation to



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their lips, just like the disciples. And even though our chalice doesn't have two handles, there is still a hand-off: from the hand of the priest, to the hand of the baptized. It's as if we were at the Last Supper sharing the sacrificial banquet with Jesus and the disciples.

Confutatio:

There is a big difference, though. At the Last Supper Jesus had not yet died. The disciples partook of the Body and Blood of Jesus *prior* to his Passion, while we partake *afterwards*. The disciples received the Body and Blood of Jesus who had not yet suffered. We receive the Body and Blood of Jesus crucified and risen: his glorious Body bearing the marks of his sorrowful Passion. This is a magnificent thing.

Digressio:

And yet look at all the empty pews! So many people in the world are on a quest for the Holy Grail – and it's right here! Sundays at nine. Tell your friends.

Peroratio:

So when we approach the altar for Holy Communion, we should do so with the utmost reverence and presence of mind and heartfelt desire. *We worship* the loving sacrifice of Jesus' Blood poured out for our sins. Long to enjoy the salvation that Jesus offers. When we drink from the chalice, Jesus comes into us in a most intimate way. He befriends us. Beg the Holy Spirit to open your heart to that friendship. Beg the Lord for the graces that come with Holy Communion. And finally, look forward to the heavenly banquet in which we will recline with Jesus and enjoy his company. O sacred banquet, in which Christ becomes our food, the memory of his passion is celebrated, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.