



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ  
Pastoral Visit to Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

*Homily*

[*Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 116; Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26*]

This has been a very difficult week and a half, to put it mildly. The discovery of many graves on the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School has struck at the heart of everyone across this land. It seems to me that no other event has served more powerfully than this discovery to bring home to the whole nation the sad and tragic legacy of residential schools.

Over the last ten days since the announcement out of Kamloops, many words have been spoken. There have been messages from Indigenous leaders, Church representatives, including even the Holy Father, and government officials; thoughts have been shared across all communication platforms; and it has been the subject of discussion at water coolers and the focus of kitchen conversations. Words need to be spoken so that we can give expression to what is in our hearts. Words also need to be heard, so that we can arrive at understanding and find the way forward through the pain and uncertainty.

It is out of this need for a word that we gather for this mass. We have heard many people say many things. What we need more than anything else is a Word from the Creator. That is exactly what we are given today. God our Father, Creator of all things, speaks to us in His Son Jesus, whose words are preserved for us in the Bible. This means that, as we listen to the passages from the Bible this morning, the Creator speaks. As we listen carefully, we hear the Creator say three things to us: I love you; I am with you; I can heal you.

“I love you.” On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus shared bread and wine with his apostles. As he did this, he said “This is my Body; this is my Blood.” With these words he was referring to his death that would take place the next day, when his crucified body would be broken and his heart’s blood poured out. As we know, Jesus gave his life precisely out of love for us. That self-gift of the Lord was for each and every person fashioned by the Creator, including you and me.

As we listen to the testimonies of residential school survivors, often we hear how their individual experiences, how even the system itself, led them to question their self-worth and robbed them of any sense of personal dignity. Well, the Word of the Creator, “I love you,” brings

an end to any self-doubting. God's love makes us loveable. God's love bestows upon us a dignity that no one and no circumstance can take away. God's love makes clear that, in the Creator's eyes, each and every one of us is precious, wanted and necessary.

"I am with you." The words of the Creator have great power. Remember how the world came to be. God spoke, and it was. God's Word has the power to create, even out of nothing. That means that God's Word has the power to re-create, to change things. Since Jesus is God, his every word has that divine power. At the Last Supper, Jesus spoke words that, ever since, have brought about change when spoken at mass by a priest: "This is my Body; this is my Blood." When the priest, acting in the person of Christ, says those words, the bread and wine are bread and wine no longer but the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. "I am with you."

In recent days we have seen many makeshift memorials arise in response to Kamloops. Children's shoes and teddy bears have been placed on steps, often of churches; candles have been lit at prayer vigils, flowers have been planted, and much more. We honour the children by remembering them. By this act of memory, we are saying that every one of those children matters. The Eucharist, the celebration of mass, is also an act of remembering, which says that we all matter to God. After Jesus said, "This is my Body; this is my Blood," he went on to say, "Do this in memory of me." Here at mass, we remember the death and resurrection of the Lord. We remember his great act of love, and all that God has done for us throughout history in fidelity to the covenant he made with us through Moses long ago. But remembering Jesus at mass is different from our remembering of loved ones who have died. They are no longer with us in person; their precious souls are in the hands of God. When we remember Jesus by recalling what he said at the Last Supper, he becomes truly with us. The same Jesus who died on the Cross is present with us in the Host and Precious Blood. "I am with you." "You matter to me." That presence of Jesus is in itself enough to bring us comfort and peace. But Jesus, who remains always with us, does more.

"I can heal you." Just before we receive Holy Communion, just before we receive Jesus, we say this: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." The discovery at Kamloops has made us all acutely aware of the need for healing. There is, of course, the trauma experienced by survivors and passed on through succeeding generations, a trauma re-triggered by this discovery. Yet, we are also aware of the broad need for healing of the racism, injustice, and indifference that separate peoples from one another. At the root of all this is the need for healing of soul, which restores the individual to their God-given dignity and brings people back together, in mutual respect and solidarity, as

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God's children. Who else but the Creator can heal our souls? This he does in the gift of His Son, Jesus, who gives himself to us in Holy Communion. He who alone can heal us, wants to.

“I love you.” “I am with you.” “I can heal you.” As we listen to many messages these days, let these words of the Creator be our foundation and hope. By the grace of the Eucharist, may God's love strengthen us, His presence comfort us, and His power heal us, as He sends us forth from this mass to be agents of the healing and reconciliation God wills for all people.

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June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021