

“I can’t breathe.” “I can’t breathe.” I never imagined I would begin today’s homily with those words. When I was planning for us to come back together, I thought to myself, “The Feast of Corpus Christi is the perfect day to resume public Mass. It’s about relationships, communion, and shared life. It’s about unity in diversity, “we though many, are one body” as we heard in our second reading.

That’s how I’ve experienced our life together here at St. A/B. That’s part of why it’s been so difficult to be apart the last twelve weeks. I’ve missed you, I’ve prayed for you, and I’ve loved you from afar. Today masks can cover your faces, but they can’t cover your beauty. And I have to say, I am so happy to see you and it feels so good to be with you.

But I also have to say again, “I can’t breathe.”

I don’t know how else to begin this sermon. These words have haunted me the last few weeks. The death they express are the exact opposite of the life we celebrate in this Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi.

I don’t know and never will know what it’s like to have the knee of a police officer against my neck, but I still can’t breathe. These last weeks have left so many in our country filled with anger, grief, and despair. And I’m one of them. I feel powerless and afraid. I don’t know who to trust. I’m overwhelmed by the violence of looters and vandals and our government. I’m heartbroken over our self-centered politics. And I’m particularly aware of my white male privilege. I’m deeply moved at the video

or pictures of George Floyd. And I'm equally moved again when I saw video of police officers kneeling before protestors, and another one of police officers and protestors dancing together in the street.

That's why I can't breathe. Those are the things that have stolen my breath the last few weeks. What about you? What have the last few weeks been like for you? I want to be able to breathe again. I want you to be able to breathe. I want the George Floyds of the world to be able to breathe. I want us to breathe faith, hope and love. I want us to breathe repentance, forgiveness, and healing. I want us to breathe compassion, justice and peace. Don't we all want these things for ourselves, for your kids and grandchildren, for the people of our country, for the world? Haven't we had enough of anger and violence and bigotry and death?

That's what Jesus is talking about when he said, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." Those are ominous words, words that should haunt us and challenge us to consider whether there is life within us. Not just physical or biological life – but the life of Christ – the compassion, the justice, the peace, the love of Christ – is Christ's life within us? Is Christ's life within us or are we filled with racism, with anger, with prejudice, with death?

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life..." Let's not back off or turn away from what has happened or what is going on within us and in our country. There are signs in our

culture that we are dying from the inside out. There is, however, treatment for our condition and the sickness within our society – there is food for our hunger. Life in Christ, not death in the wilderness, is our destiny. The flesh and blood of Christ are the medicine that saves; what St. Ignatius called “the medicine of immortality.” One dose, however, is not enough. We need a steady diet of this sacred medicine, this holy food. In the eating and drinking of Christ’s flesh and blood, he lives in us and we live in him. We consume his life that he might consume and change ours. We eat and digest his life, his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his way of being and seeing, his compassion, and we take his presence into the world.

Jesus promises to be with us always. That is not necessarily a promise to always be on our side. Sometimes we need to make a move to something new and different. This is our time. This is America’s time. This is the Church’s time. This is your time and my time to embrace more fully what it means to be the Body and Blood of Christ in our world.

That Jesus is with us always has never been in question. The only question is this: Are we with him? Are each of us with him? That’s a question we must each answer for ourselves. But before you answer that question, I want you to do something. Take a long deep breath.