

Let us pray: Dear God, we come to you hungry and thirsty for renewal, for peace, and for your grace; restore us and nourish us at your table today. Amen.

- Many years ago now, when I was a freshman in college, I remember owning a plant.
 - It was an aloe vera plant- do you know what those are?
 - It looked a whole lot like this one!
 - It was silly- I even named this plant... his name was Spanky.
 - And there is no good reason for that name at all- just being silly.
 - I really took care of this plant: it started off small, as an offshoot of another aloe vera plant
 - I watered it, fertilized it, set it outside to get sun light, and even rain
 - It grew more and more, and I even transplanted it to a larger pot, to give its roots more room to grow
 - Things were looking pretty good for my plant
 - It had very large and thick leaves, or what looked like thick stalks
 - On rare occasion, I would break a piece off and use it to treat burns on my hand, or other scrapes and cuts
 - And all was going well, until one fateful day we were driving home, maybe over Christmas break or something, I don't remember
 - And my plant turned over and spilled out in the floor board of the car
 - We tried to replant it, but I suppose the roots were damaged, because it did not go well after that
 - And honestly I had less time to care for it the next semester than I did before
 - Can you imagine what happened next to that plant?
 - Yup, the big, thick, healthy leaves started to brown one at a time, and fall off
 - Tiny new leaves were trying to grow, but they never got big
 - Over time, I realized that this plant was just not going to make it
 - It just could not get enough water and nutrients to grow big and strong again.
 - Finally, the last of the green vanished and I had to give up on my plant.
 - It just never quite recovered after that spill

- I think you and I have some things in common with that plant, don't we?
- You've been learning a little about that over the past month
- I think Jesus knew that just like our bodies need water and good nutrition,
- Our souls need it too
- So I want you to think back this month: what did Jesus teach us that sounds a lot like my aloe vera plant?
- [HE IS THE VINE, WE ARE THE BRANCHES]
- Yes, that's right- he describes us as branches attached to the true vine, Jesus.
- And God as the loving and caring gardener
- What do you think he meant by that?
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- I think Jesus was trying to get us to realize our souls are a lot like plants
- They need nourishment too, like our bodies
- What happens when your body gets hungry or thirsty?
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- Exactly, we can feel that easily, right?
- But it is harder to know when our soul is needing God's refreshment
- So Jesus explains it to us simply so we can understand
- Now our soul will not wither up and die like a plant, but it does tend to get brittle, and uncaring, and very tired when we do not take care of it
- Maybe we start to forget just how much we are loved
- That is, after all, the primary reason Jesus came to earth.
- To remind us that we are so very loved, and to ask us to love each other too
- Easy question: Here we are in church, and you have been studying this for a month or so now
- Who loves us more than anything in the world?
- [GOD, JESUS]
- Yes! God loves us so much that it is hard to describe it.
- Jesus tells us some more stories, or parables, to help us understand just how much God loves us
- And you all heard them
- Do you remember the parable about the lost coin?
- [TELL ME ABOUT IT]
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- Do you remember the parable about the lost sheep? 99 left
- [TELL ME ABOUT IT]

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- And we just read our Gospel today, about the lost son.
 - What do you remember about that?
 - [TELL ME ABOUT IT]
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- Yes! they all describe just how much God loves us-
 - We are precious like a gold coin to a poor widow
 - We are precious like a sheep to the shepherd
 - And we are definitely like a lost son coming home to an overjoyed father!
 - There is just no limit to God's love, or how much God wants us to love God back
 - And to love each other
- So we know that God loves us
 - We know our souls need God like plants need water, soil, and sunshine
 - We know that God's love and grace are what can keep our soul and heart full of love and able to love others
 - So how do we get our soul the food and water it needs?
 - How do we take in all of the love that Jesus has for us?
 - [COMMUNION, PRAYER, TALKING WITH GOD]
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- Exactly, which is really what brings us all here today. Holy Communion, or we also call it the Eucharist.
- Every week here at St. Michael's we retell the story of God's love, of Jesus coming, and of the bread and the wine
- We believe that Jesus is actually present, really here with us, in this bread and wine
- That's why we call it body and blood- it is Jesus's actual presence.
- We are not vampires, or zombies, it is still bread and wine to our tongues and our stomachs
- But we believe that the Holy Spirit comes when a priest asks, and fills this bread and wine with so much more
- It is full of Jesus himself, body and blood, love and grace
- And it feeds our souls.
- It reminds us of the things we need: that we are loved, and our souls can grow full of that love
- It is our way to connect to the Vine, and to the gardener to who created us and has big hopes and dreams for our lives
- Every week we offer it here at St. Michael's

- I think the early Christians figured out that if we go much longer than one week, we might start to forget
- And our souls might start to get hungry for that love
- So every week we meet here to remember and refill
- All of that in a little wafer, and a little sip of wine- because it is packed full of Jesus's very presence
- A 10 course meal for our souls!
- Every time you take that little bite and little drink, remember these parables
 - Remember the vine and the branches
 - The lost coin, son, and sheep, and remember just how much God loves you
 - And know that God is preparing you for all that is to come in your life
 - Good, bad, ups, and downs- this soul food can get you through it.
 - This bread and wine, body and blood, will nourish and grow your soul and help you bloom into the person God always knew you could
 - The one God created you to be
 - Loved, and full of love for others, and ready to help bring about a whole kingdom of God's love in the world around us.
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- You all did good today- and in a few moments I want you all to come with me to the altar as we ask the Holy Spirit to bless this bread and wine
- And then we can share it together.
- And leave here full of God's grace and love

Amen.