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Working for the Food that Endures, Third Monday of Easter, May 6, 2019

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By Fr. Roger J. Landry, Diocese of Fall River

[Excerpt]

I would like to make three other applications. Today is the 41st anniversary of my first Holy Communion. Whenever I think back to that day, at St. Michael's Parish in Lowell, MA, I remember how much preparation went into it: at least four

years of longing, from the time I thought that those who received Jesus in Holy Communion were the luckiest people alive and that the priest who was able to hold him in his hands and give him to others the most fortunate creatures in the universe; so much preparation and attention, a nice used suit, several good confessions, the attempt to bring my young life into a holy Communion with the God I would receive. I think we all love the prayer that Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity put in every sacristy with regard to priests, to celebrate this Mass as if it were your first Mass, your last Mass, your only Mass. Each of us is called to receive the Lord in Holy Communion each time as if it were the first, the last, or the only time we would. And to labor for that gift! The second application is to Fr. Ernest Blais who was my predecessor as pastor of Notre Dame (later St. Bernadette) parish in Fall River, who died 25 years ago today and for whom I've been asked to offer Mass. I didn't know him personally, but we shared a bond. He had bequeathed his beautiful gold chalice, filled with precious gems, to the parish at his death and we would use it for the greatest feast days of the year. We know that Jesus didn't have such a precious chalice during the Last Supper and shouldn't overemphasize the things of the liturgy, yet at the same time, Fr. Blais' munificence in spending so much on a beautiful paten and chalice to touch the body and blood of the Lord, says something. I never appraised them, but my guess is that they were worth at least \$25,000, maybe even \$50,000, the equivalent of two, three or more years of a priest's salary. Fr. Blais was showing that he was working for the food that endures to eternal life by working so hard for what would contain that eternal food. We remember him today and ask the Lord to bring him to the fulfillment of the eucharistic banquet in heaven. The third application is to Fr. John Mendicoa, a priest friend of mine from my youth, who died suddenly on Thursday of leukemia that I found out about only a few hours before he died. He was originally from the Basque region of Spain and came to our parish

when he was teaching at the University of Lowell. All of us were captivated by how he would pray the Mass, especially the consecration, with his thick accent. We knew that he firmly believed that he was holding God in his hands. I also witnessed his Eucharistic love later in life. In 2011, he was falsely accused of abuse in the 1980s (which is when I first knew him, working for five years at St. Michael's rectory). The accusations were found unsubstantiated after a year's investigation and he was given retirement status, but — for reasons beyond me, but what seems to be so that certain victims' groups wouldn't protest him as if he were guilty and as if the Archdiocese of Boston weren't doing it's job to keep people safe, even though he was innocent — kept in restricted ministry. He needed to ask for permission to celebrate public Masses. It was a very difficult cross for him, but he kept on living a Eucharistic life. He was from a generation of priests who never really celebrated private Masses, but during these years of restricted ministry, as he lived with and cared for Fr. Paul Bailey, my childhood pastor who died three months ago today, he would attend daily Mass at Holy Trinity Parish in West Harwich, MA, and adore the Eucharistic Lord every day at the beautiful Our Lady of Life Eucharistic Chapel on the parish property. We pray for him, too, that all his labors and love for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist have in fact led him to eternal life and that his faith in Christ, the one essential work, has led him from walking by faith to the beatific vision.