This past week, I spent a few evenings in a local hospital standing at the bedside of a young person. He had been driving, stopped his car for a red light, and was rear-ended by a drunken driver. The innocent victim wound up in an ICU unit. Who was present at his bedside: the young person’s mother, father, grandmother and brother. You can imagine the concern, prayers, and affection that these family members directed towards this young person. ... No one spoke many words. Everyone’s eyes, however, focused on the young man lying down. Every breath that he emitted, we watched carefully. Every word that he spoke, we listened to intensely. Each person’s concern was projected outside of oneself onto the patient. Not just family, but also doctors, nurses, technicians, and aides glued their attention and concern onto this one person in the greatest need at that moment. Why do we do this? Because God created us to be and to act this way. Because we are created in God’s image, we naturally focus on caring for and responding to the needs of other people. And we act at our best when we act this way. At these moments, each of us acts in a God-like self-emptying, self-sacrificing way.

Today’s second reading describes Jesus’ self-emptying love. The reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians declares, “Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at, rather he emptied himself and became a man like us in all things except sin.” Jesus remains fully God, and he became fully man. As God, he has power to save us from our sins. As man, he identifies with every person. Of what does Jesus empty himself? Of the status of being distant in heaven apart from the mundane life of being human. By becoming fully man, he becomes like us in everything except sin. Jesus’ change occurs in his being: he is no longer just God; by his incarnation, he becomes man also. In the earliest centuries of the Church, two main heresies arose: one claimed that Jesus was God and merely bore the form of a man without being a man, and the other heresy was the opposite, that Jesus was a very good man whom people thought to be like a God but was not God. The Church condemned both those heresies, and declared that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man in one person.

Jesus demonstrates self-emptying by his Incarnation. Living on earth, Jesus’ self-emptying continued. He was born in a manger. His family’s socio-economic status was that of a carpenter, not of a king. As a boy, he was raised in the Jewish faith and learned it well. As an itinerant preacher, he taught the Eight Beatitudes, the Kingdom of God sayings, his almost three dozen parables, and the criterion of judgment: “when I was hungry, do you give me to eat; when I was thirsty, did you give me to drink; when I was sick, did you visit me?” All of these teachings call people to empty themselves, to transform themselves from temptation to self-seeking to the practice of self-emptying. ... Jesus performed three dozen miracles, in which he exuded effective power to help and heal people. ... At the Last Supper, on the evening before he gave up for us his physical body and blood, he gave us his sacramental body and blood, commanding us: “This is my body, take and eat it. This is my blood, take and drink it. Do this in memory
of me.” From the first day to last day of his life, Jesus spent every day in self-giving, self-emptying love of God for us.

Now, you and I. Everyday of our lives, we perform acts of self-emptying love. Rhetorically speaking, what are some of your recent moments when you did good for God or others in a self-emptying way? ... At home? ... At work? ... At church? ... In your local community? ... When did you let the image of God shine through your actions or inactions, through your speaking up or keeping silent? ... In these moments, the grace of God works through us. Grace becomes integrated within us. The Holy Spirit lives in and through us.

In a few moments we will receive the Eucharist which along with the crucifixion, death and resurrection is the culmination of Jesus’ earthly life of self-emptying. When we receive this sacrament of Jesus’ self-giving, Jesus intends to inspire us and empower us to practice our own expressions of self-giving and self-emptying. May your continuous reception of Communion, deepen within you communion with Jesus and your self-giving to other people.