

June 14, 2020  
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ  
(Corpus Christi)

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16ab  
Psalm 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20  
1 Corinthians 10:16-17  
John 6:51-58

In the hopes of securing a measure of unity to an otherwise somewhat fractured group of people in Corinth the Apostle Paul emphatically wrote,

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *communion* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break; is it not a *communion* in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1Cor. 10:16-17).

This second reading this morning sets the stage for today’s homily and the Solemnity of *The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ*. Some of you may be more familiar with its other name, the *Feast of Corpus Christi*.

The word communion in the fore mentioned passage means to participate in or have an active share in the sacramental body and blood of Christ. In other words to commune in the body and blood of Christ literally means to possess an active common share in the life, death, resurrection, and presence of Jesus Christ. As Lord of all, it is He who determines the identity and lifestyle and resultant unity of which all Christians are invited to share.

In addition and because the original language concerning this passage suggests an active or dynamic participation in a marital covenant, and because it is worded in the form of a betrothal contract, one could easily conclude that the word participate is

associated with the norms of a first century groom celebrating the unity of marriage.

For example the writer would naturally assume that the groom's identity and his lifestyle would eventually be assumed and/or expected of the bride. Hence, the word communion has a very deep theological and unifying context in regards to the Eucharist and the acknowledgment of the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament.

During the past several years we have been learning that for the historical church, the Eucharist is the source and summit of our life and catholic Christian worship of God. Therefore, what could be more important or more precious than to remember the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ and then to celebrate the fact that He continues to reveal His Presence and give himself to us in the form of bread and wine each time Our Father gathers us together in the Celebration of the Eucharist?

Some may ask, "why is the Eucharist so important in orthodox Catholic theology. The reason is simple. Christianity is a liturgical religion, thus the very center of our spiritual lives is the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist. Now to most people sitting in this room, we all have a general understanding of this thesis, but to growing number of Christians their understanding of the heart of Christian worship would be the music or the message.

However the truth be known, the celebration and participation in the Eucharist is the very act that constitutes or embodies the Church. In essence when the gathered people come together to celebrate in the Eucharist they become the Church and/or the Bride of Christ.

In other words with out the body and blood of Jesus Christ being shared amongst the gathered people, there is no Church. Wherever the Bishop and the Eucharist is, there is the Church. The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ gives the Church being, life, and purpose in the same way marriage brings forth new life in it's union.

Please allow me to illustrate this concept with another metaphor. Leopold Stokowski, the composer who founded the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra in 1945, once said, "A painter paints his pictures on canvas. But musicians paint their pictures on silence." So then, when a painter paints his picture on a blank canvas, the once blank page takes on a whole new meaning and form.

When an orchestra warms up and begins to tune its instruments it sounds like chaotic noise; but when the conductor raises his hands all falls silent until he begins with the down stroke of the first beat, and then the silence [explodes] into melodic music."

In the same manner as both painter and musician make something from nothing so to speak, Jesus instead of utilizing the paint and canvas or the silence before the concert begins, He uses the ordinary bread and wine, the fruit of our human hands to reveal and communicate His Real Presence to those gathered in His name.

In the same manner that a participant who views a painting or listens to a musical composition is changed or moved in body, soul, and spirit, so it is that when the communicant receives and eats the body and blood of Jesus he/she is changed by the encounter.

Indeed, this sacrament is a profound mystery. However, as we read earlier, the Lord God cautioned the people not to forget the things they had been told. Unfortunately, researchers who follow church

trends state that the church in general is at an all time low point concerning respect for the Eucharist. Somehow many segments of the church have failed to remember the supernatural significance of this sacred covenant.

Moses knew the natural tendency of God's people to forget and succumb to a stubbornness of heart; therefore in today's first reading he instructed the people,

Remember how for forty years now the LORD, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments. He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, in order to show you that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:2-3).

However, at this point some people may be asking, what does this ancient story have to do with today's Solemnity of *The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ*? Well, we might say, everything.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:1-3, "These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall" (see 1 Cor. 10:1-13).

Here we learn that the Old Testament Bible stories were written as models or paradigms for instruction in practical living. They teach us what is right and what is wrong and the differences between what is good and what is evil, and how we are to live and how not

to live. One might even say that the Old Testament stories serve to introduce New Testament truths and validate the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles – again separating truth from fiction, orthodoxy from heterodoxy.

The major themes in the Old Testament reveal God's saving covenant with His people, indeed a covenant linked to obedience, sacrifice, and eating food. We mentioned the word covenant. In a nutshell, covenants can be easily understood by this simple formula, "I will do this and this, if you will do thus and thus.

In addition as mentioned earlier, most ancient covenants included a sacrifice, which focused on the communal sharing of the sacrificed food, and the built in provisions that guarantee the surety of the agreement over time.

To the Israelite in the harsh desert climate, manna from heaven, indeed, what the Lord called bread from heaven, and water from the rock, which incidentally St. Paul said the rock that followed them through the wilderness was Christ, was God's guarantee that His covenant with Israel was still in effect.

God guaranteed that He would provide for them and protect them if they would faithfully obey His commandments. Covenantal life with God was very simple, He would provide the heavenly food, they must believe and trust in Him and then daily gather the food, and eat it to live.

Here we see that the manna, and the water were not the actual covenant, but in reality they were the guarantee, you might say the physical evidence or substance representing the Word of God that made His Real Presence known or real to them. Not only did God

give them bread to eat and water to drink, but He also rained down flesh from heaven in the form of quail.

As long as there was water to drink, and bread and meat to eat each day, the Israelites knew that God was with them. Indeed, this miraculous food and water was their guarantee extraordinaire that they had found favor with the Lord God of Heaven and Earth.

After the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land the manna ceased to appear. However most people unless they are of Jewish descent, do not realize that Jewish tradition records that the Jewish mystics continued to believe that the manna would some day return ushered in with the New Messianic Kingdom. Indeed, the fulfillment and surety of this future covenantal event would be the reinstatement of the heavenly bread coming down from heaven.

To this end Jesus fulfilled the new messianic promise when He announced to the world, I am the living Bread that came down from Heaven. In John's gospel, Jesus gave new meaning to the manna that came down from heaven. Four times in unmistakable language Jesus declares that His flesh and blood are indeed food and drink. "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you." His followers dropped him like hot cakes fresh off the griddle. Many were deeply offended, and some refused to listen to him anymore.

At first glance we can understand their reasoning, but today we must not shy away from uncomfortable theology, or jump to humanistic conclusions by trying to rationalize away this beautiful sacramental mystery.

Jesus clearly taught that just as we, and the food we eat become one, so Jesus and those who feed on Him become one. The mystery of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ cannot be explained empirically in scientific or psychological terms. On the contrary it is to be apprehended with the heart of the supernatural. I think the protestant reformer John Calvin was on the right track when he said; "I would rather experience the Eucharist than attempt to explain it."

To illustrate this point, when the manna was lying on the ground in the wilderness, most people believed it was food from heaven and it was good to eat. To believe that it was heavenly sent manna lying on the ground did them little good, they had to gather it, and then they had to eat it in order to live.

In closing let us leave with this thought. The Eucharist is a whole lot more than an obligatory event that takes place at Mass every Sunday. Indeed, it is much more than simply receiving the consecrated sacramental bread and wine. You see the Eucharist is not something we do, or say, or attend whether alone or together, and it is not confined to receiving a tangible element or even to a mystical substance.

Indeed, the Eucharist is not a thing, a ritual, or for that matter a human reason defying sacramental mystery. The Eucharist is a person, a very real live flesh and blood person, a person who loves you and me very much, and His name is Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.