

MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST A/2005

The feast of the most holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus is one of the most significant we celebrate in our church and whose meaning goes beyond our own imagining. To better understand the sense of this feast, let us, first of all, go to the source of our faith as expressed in the revelation God did to Moses and the children of Israel. In fact, as the Jews wandered through the desert after escaping from Egypt, they started grumbling because they did not have enough food to eat. God heard their complaint and provided them with bread from heaven, which they called *manna*.

God saved his people from starvation by feeding them much like a mother feeds her children with food they need to grow strong and healthy. Therefore, the Jews considered manna to be the symbol of God's saving power and a sign of his great love for his people. In fact, by feeding them, God wanted them to realize that their lives depend on him alone. He wanted also to show them how his word is capable of solving situations that humanly speaking are desperate; and the way this happens came to them as a great and welcome surprise.

However, what happens with Israel in the desert was just a prefiguration of the great gift that God will give many years later through his son, Jesus Christ. This is why, in today's Gospel Jesus compares his body and blood in the Eucharist to the manna his Father gave the Jews in the desert. Jesus' body and blood is special food from heaven which, like the manna, is evidence of God's saving power and his great love. Although Jesus' body and blood and the manna are similar, they are not identical because those who ate the manna in the desert still die but those who eat Jesus' body and drink his blood will have eternal life. Therefore, Jesus' body and blood in the Eucharist is greater than the manna and is an even better expression of God's saving power and love for his people.

By referring to contemporary time which is ours, let me say this: although the bread and wine we receive at the table of the Eucharist are like, and taste like those we buy in the grocery stores, we have more than the ordinary bread and wine. It is Christ who gives himself to us as our spiritual nourishment. Such an understanding draws its strength from the last Supper when Jesus taking a piece of bread and a cup of wine says to his disciples: "*this is my body which is given for you*" and this "*is the new covenant in my blood*" (Lk 22, 19-20). In this context, eating and drinking at the table of the Eucharist is not only participating in the death and the resurrection of Christ, but is also having eternal life in us. This is the promise we have received from Christ: those who eat his flesh and drink his blood will rise from their graves. This promise is the foundation for the Christian belief and conviction that at the end of the world we will rise from the dead just as Jesus rose from the tomb. Like Jesus' resurrection, our own resurrection will be bodily and not just spiritual. What is more is that Christ's life has already started now in us, into this world, by our participation in his death and resurrection through baptism and the Eucharist.

This being understood clearly, what does it mean to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus? What implications such an eating and a drinking brings for our

Christian life? First of all, what happens when we eat material bread? This food is assimilated and becomes part of ourselves. It is transformed into our own flesh. Jesus says he is the Bread. It is his person that must be eaten, must be assimilated. It is his very existence given up for us that must become our own existence. One should not eat the Eucharist bread just to be closer to Jesus, but rather to be transformed by him. In this context, communion in the body of Christ means to accept to identify ourselves with him. It means to offer up our own selves to him so that he keeps living, suffering, giving himself and rising again in us. This is why St Paul insists that before eating this bread and drinking this cup, the Christian must “recollect himself” (1Cor 11, 28), and see if he is really ready to let the life of Jesus continue in him.

This transformation of our own person into the person of Jesus does not happen magically. If the Eucharist is to have effect, it must be received in faith, that is, we must be ready to be transformed into the person of Jesus. In this sense, communion is the sign that we accept to be transformed into the body of Christ. After communion, whoever meets us, whoever looks at our deeds, at our way of acting with others should be able to recognize in us Jesus who continues to love, act, speak, teach, and smile...

Finally, the Eucharist is not only the celebration of our union with God and our identification with Christ, but it also celebrates our union with our sisters and brothers. In this sense, the invitation of Christ to share through the Eucharist in the very life of God is a challenge to our own life of sisterhood and brotherhood. If it is from this bread, shared by all the sisters and brothers, that springs the unity of Christ's disciples, what shall we do to strengthen our bonds as members of a Parish community and of the church? What to do in order to be conform to Christ, when being very devout in our reverence for the Eucharist and still live in a way that is self-centered, thoughtless and hardhearted? Let me now finish by making an inclusion: We know by human experience that if we don't eat, our physically body will weaken and we will eventually die. But, what will happen to our spiritual selves if we don't partake of spiritual food?

Deut 8, 2-3, 14b-16a; 1 Corinthians 10, 16-17; John 6, 51-58



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