

## **MOST BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST 2006/B**

In our modern world we are used to a variety of treaties between nations and peoples. In the case of peace treaty, for instance, when two people settle for peace, they, first of all, set the conditions for it. Then, after having discussed the pros and cons and come to an agreement, they sign it in a big ceremony where they exchange not only the documents, but also a toast to seal it.

It is such a ceremony that is described in today 1<sup>st</sup> reading. First of all, Moses reminds the people of the precepts of the Lord and asks them if they are ready to accept them. From their positive answer, he sets an altar and offers sacrifices to the Lord. Symbolically, the altar represents God and the twelve stones the twelve tribes of Israel. Moreover, as it was the custom in that time, the alliance was sealed with the blood of the animals offered in sacrifice. Through the ceremony of the touching of the blood, people engaged in the alliance and showed that they have become allies and could not betray each other.

In this perspective, the splashing of the blood on the altar and the sprinkling on the people consecrated the “alliance” between God and Israel. It meant that henceforth there is an inseparable communion between God and Israel. God and Israel have become one people, sharing in the same blood. This is the meaning of the words Moses used to express this commitment: “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his”.

We know, however, that Israel has been repeatedly unfaithful to God’s covenant. Not willing to abandon his people to their rebellious thoughts and deeds, God promised through the prophets that one day he will make a new covenant to which all his people will be obedient and loyal as we read it in Jeremiah 31, 31-34.

It is in this context that we have to understand the New Covenant realized in the blood of Jesus Christ described in today’s Gospel as the fulfillment of the promise given by the prophets. What is striking in this text is the fact that Jesus uses exactly the same words, as in the alliance between God and Israel, to explain the sense of his death as the establishment of New Covenant between God and humanity. Most significantly, by taking the bread and giving it as his body, and by offering the cup as his blood, Jesus identifies himself with the holocausts of the sacrifice by means of which the old covenant was established. His body and his blood present on the altar under the signs of bread and wine signify the total immolation of his life for the salvation of the world.

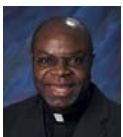
When the bread and wine are consecrated during the celebration of the holy Eucharist, they become the body and the blood of Christ in response to his commandment: “*Do this in memory of me*”. As the Gospel says, “*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said, “Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many”*”. Although the external appearance of consecrated bread is not different from the bread we share at our tables in our homes, there is, however, more than a simple bread. Although the external color and the taste of the consecrated wine are not different from various wines we savor at our tables, there is more than mere wine. It is Jesus himself who gives his life to us under these species. In the consecrated bread and wine, Jesus nourishes and waters spiritually his followers.

As you can see, the logic presiding at the gesture of Jesus is full of meaning. He makes a simple piece of bread stand for his body and a simple cup of wine for his blood. There is here a mysterious exchange and transformation that makes the species of bread and wine the sacramental body and blood of Christ. It means that when the bread and the wine are consecrated, their material reality goes beyond the mere matter and refers spiritually to the upper reality of Christ's body and blood. In this perspective, the bread and wine become an external sign of the hidden presence of the body and the blood of Jesus.

What we receive at the table of the altar as bread and wine is an outward sign of the inner and mysterious activity of Jesus operating within them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to give life to the world. The consecrated bread and wine are sign and reality at the same time; they are a remembrance of the past, but also the making present today of what Jesus has done. Because Christ is "the same today as he was yesterday and will be tomorrow", his giving himself in the Eucharist is continuous and relevant to all times and ages; it is perpetual to all the generations. Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated in remembrance of Jesus, Christ offers his body and blood through the signs of bread and wine as he did with his disciples two thousands years ago.

In the Old Testament, in order to keep the covenant alive and to implore God's saving power on the people, the priest offered each year the blood of animals on the altar in the temple. Christ, instead, shed his blood once and for all because it has an infinite value and has purified all people from their sins. That is why the letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus as the priest of the New Alliance and the mediator of the New Covenant. As the text says, If the blood of the animals and their sprinkling sanctified those who were defiled so that they were cleansed, how much more the blood of the unblemished Christ will cleanse our consciences from the dead works that lead to death?

To eat and drink at the table of the Eucharist is to receive Christ and to be in united with him. How can we share the table of Christ without being in communion with him and with one another? The feast of the body and blood of Christ reminds of us the importance of the community. If we eat at the same table like members of one family, how can we hate each other? The Eucharist reminds us also that every good and change in the world and in our lives comes out of sacrifice, and some times out of shedding blood. Those who toil to improve the living conditions of their fellow human beings, those who provide a better living standard for their families and their children by working hard, giving up all human satisfactions, these are the people who shed their own "blood" for the love of their brothers and sisters. By doing so, they resemble Christ and imitate his love. Today we remember some of them, our fathers. May God bless today all our fathers, living and dead, for the wonderful work they have done to bring us up. Let us pray also for those who have never known their fathers and whose memory they grieve. May God bless each of us, and through the reception of the Blessed Sacrament, helps us to be reunited with Christ, our peace and our hope.



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