

Most Holy and Blood of Christ C/2007

In a society of abundance like ours, bread or water is not a big deal. The problem perhaps would be what to choose among the variety of foods and drinks proposed on our market that would be more beneficial to our body. For the poor, however, a piece of bread is more than sustenance; it is a matter of life or death; it is all about survival and life itself.

All the readings of this Sunday make a close link between the Eucharist and life, between the bread that is Christ and the bread that nourishes the body. The first reading recalls the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek, king of Salem and a priest of God Most High. In that time as Abraham came back from battle, Melchizedek met him and offered the bread and wine to God in thanksgiving for Abraham's victory over his enemies. After having blessed Abraham, the latter gave to Melchizedek one tenth of all he got in the battle.

The first meaning of Melchizedek's name is "king of righteousness" and, because he was king of Salem, which means peace, his name also means "king of peace". There is no record of Melchizedek's father or mother or of any of his ancestors; no record of his birth or of his death. He is like the Son of God; he remains a priest forever (Hebrews 7, 1-3). Because of his mysterious origin and the particularity of his priesthood, Melchizedek is seen as the prefiguration of Christ, and of the priests of the new Covenant who offer bread and wine on the altar in obedience to the recommendation of Christ.

As St Paul said in the second reading, the Eucharist is the commemoration of the last supper Jesus had with his disciples. It is a perpetuation in time of the sacrifice of the cross through which Jesus gave up his life for our salvation. In fact, "on the night he was handed over, Jesus took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me". In the same way, he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me".

After giving the bread and the cup of wine to his disciples, Jesus did not say, "this is my bread and my wine", but rather "This is my body"... "This is my blood". In this perspective, the Eucharistic bread and wine we receive at the altar are the unbloody sacrifice of the self-immolation Jesus performed, once and for all, on the cross. His body and 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. That is why as St Paul said, "As often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" again.

When the bread and wine are consecrated during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, they become the body and the blood of Christ. Anytime the bread and wine are consecrated by an ordained minister, according to the order of priest Melchizedek and with the words Jesus intended to be used, they are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the body and the blood of Christ.

Because Christ is “the same today as he was yesterday and will be tomorrow”, his giving himself in the Eucharist is continuous and concomitant to all times and all ages; it is perpetual to all the generations. Whenever and wherever the Eucharist is celebrated in remembrance of Jesus, Christ offers his body and blood in order to give life to the world, as he did two thousands years ago.

All this can help us understand another aspect of the Eucharist we find in today’s Gospel. In fact, by referring, on this feast of Corpus Christi, to the miracle of the multiplication of five loaves and two fish Jesus performed to feed five thousand people, Luke would like to tell us that in the Eucharist we are fed by the Lord who gives us his body and blood as nourishment. In the Eucharist, the Lord Jesus feeds us, strengthens us and restores our energy so that we keep going in our pilgrimage on earth. Physical hunger needs physical food, but spiritual hunger needs to be satisfied only by the bread that comes from the hand of the Son of God.

By describing the scene of the multiplication of bread with the words we use for the consecration of the Eucharist, Luke places the Eucharist at the center of Christian life. In fact, in our way through the desert of life, we are in need. The Lord is there present; he comes to us with his care and love, feeding us with “the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation”.

To eat and to drink at the table of the Eucharist is to receive Christ, and to be united with him. But as the love of God is inseparable from the love of our fellow human beings, it means that we cannot be united with Jesus without being in communion with one another. That is why the feast of the body and blood of Christ reminds us of the importance of the community. We cannot eat at the same table, and at the same time maintain division, grudges and hatred with one another. Moreover it is from the bread shared together that springs up our unity. As the disciple of Jesus, what do you do to increase unity our parish community?

If the Lord nourishes us as we are at his table, how can we receive the Eucharist without thinking of the poor and the needy who have no material bread? This question is important; it rises out of the fact that the bread Jesus multiplied to nourish people was what some among the crowd brought to him. In other words, the Eucharist compels us to solidarity, to share with those who have nothing.

Finally, let us remember that, though our society is a society of abundance, many people hunger and thirst for friendship, love, forgiveness, understanding, respect, etc. Where we suffer from absence, Jesus wants to be present to us with all the concern of a friend for a friend. He wants to share with us his life and strengthen us. He wants to mean something to you and me. Would you like to open your heart to him and to make communion with him possible? God bless you!

Genesis 14, 18-20; 1 Corinthians 11, 23-26; Luke 9, 11b-17



Date: June 10, 2007

© 2007 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20070610homily.pdf