

## **Sunday of the Most Holy and Blood of Christ A/2008**

We all need food and drink in order to live and keep ourselves in good health. Adults and children, young and old..., we all need to nourish our body in order to sustain our life. Without bread and without water, we end up damaging our health. What is true for physical life is also true for spiritual life. All the readings on this solemnity of the body and blood of Jesus highlight the love and care of God who provides for our needs by nourishing us spiritually.

The first reading relates the story of the vicissitudes of Israel in the desert. During the difficult period in the desert, God took care of his people and gave them water and bread they needed to sustain their life. Beyond the care God provided for the physical needs of his people, the text says that God's intention was to teach the Israelites that it is not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord.

For that, Israel should never forget God who brought them from Egypt and was so caring by quenching their thirst and feeding their hunger with a food they never tasted before. In other words, God wanted to teach them that he alone is the benefactor of his people and his main protector. The survival of his people depends on him. Would the Israelites have depended on their own resources, they would have perished.

This message helps us better understand the importance of today's Gospel. We who are today exhausted as we journey tiredly through life, Jesus offers us his own body and blood in order to nourish us so that we keep going on with life.

To begin, Jesus presents himself as the bread that gives life to the world. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever", he says. As it appears in this text, Jesus uses a mystical language in talking about himself. He is the one who gives life; he is the one who satisfies the hungers of humans and their deep desires. He has come down from heaven in order to give life to those who believe in him.

However, Jesus says more than that. First of all, that the word of Jesus is a spiritual food, that is just normal and everybody understands it. But where he adds more is when he says "The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world". In this sentence, as far as our understanding is concerned, there is identification between the bread that Jesus gives and his own flesh. That bread he gives, gives life in the same way as does his person.

That is exactly what the Jews have understood. And that is why they started quarreling among themselves about the saying of Jesus: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

We have to remember that any time Jesus was misunderstood, he directly corrected his listeners. We have an example in the case of Nicodemus. When Jesus talked to him about being born again, his reaction was: How can an adult man be born again? Can he enter his mother's womb and be born a second time? In the end, Jesus told him that it was all about being born of the Spirit and not otherwise.

Another example is the death of Lazarus. When Jesus told his disciples that their friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, their reaction was, "If he is asleep, Lord, he'll get well". To which Jesus answered plainly, "Lazarus is dead".

But, in this particular case of the bread that is his flesh to be eaten, instead of correcting what he said, for instance by saying, "You are mistaken; you know that was just symbolic language I used", Jesus let them take it as it is, in a very literal sense.

Then he can say with force, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink". In all these words, according to Hebrew anthropology, it is clear that flesh, body, blood stand for the whole person of Jesus.

In this perspective, the point of the feast of the most holy body and blood of Jesus is to remind us that Jesus is entirely, in a mysterious way, present in the Eucharist. The bread and the cup we offer at the altar in the Eucharist are truly the body and the blood of Christ. Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharistic bread and cup in order to maintain his life within us. By receiving the bread and the cup at the altar, we receive the body and blood of Jesus.

Because Jesus is entirely present in the Eucharistic bread and wine, he can say, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him". By receiving the body and the blood of Christ, we become one with him and are united with him who feeds us so that we may have eternal life. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we celebrate this mysterious presence of the Lord within us and within our community. By sharing the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist, we partake in the mystery of his life that he offered once on the cross for our salvation.

As St Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless is a participation in the blood of Christ. The bread that we break is a participation in the body of Christ. In that regard, the Eucharist has a double sense of making present the sacrifice of the cross and of maintaining our union with Christ through our unity with our brothers and sisters. St Paul puts this perspective in a very clear statement: "Because the loaf of bread is one, we though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf". As we come together at the same table to receive the body and blood of Jesus, we are challenged to show our unity as the people of God, and as brothers and sisters. What do we do for the unity of our own families, too? Can we consent to work together for unity in our Church in our world? May God give you his life as you receive Christ in the Blessed Sacrament! May he bless you all!

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



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