

MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST SUNDAY A/2011

The readings of this Sunday bring us at the center of what makes the essence of our Christian life, namely the Eucharist. The feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ we celebrate today is rooted in what God has done for the people of Israel many years in the past.

In fact, when the people of Israel were sojourning in the desert, abated by hunger and thirst, God came to their rescue with the miracle of manna and water. We learn that the main reason why God let them wander in the wilderness in such a condition was in order to show them that not on bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

In that perspective, it is absolutely clear that God wanted them to realize that their survival depends on him alone and not on someone else or on something else. That is why Moses enjoined them not to forget God who brought them from Egypt and saved them against natural disasters and calamities.

What we learn from this text is that our survival and our success depend on God alone. Of course, we are responsible for our life and for our future. It is also true that if we do not do anything in order to succeed in life, no one will do it for us. However, there is a truth we ought to re-learn today, namely that even where we have worked hard, the success was possible only because God blessed us. As Psalm 127 says, we should never forget that if the Lord does not build a house, it is in vain that the builders work; if he does not guard a city, it is in vain that the guards keep watch.

That dimension of God as caring and savior is what is behind this feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. In fact, by instituting the Corpus Christi feast, the Church wants to teach us that it is Jesus who gives us life and sustains us into life. As St John says in the Gospel, Jesus is the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats that bread will live forever and the bread he gives is his flesh for the life of the world.

These words of Jesus were very difficult to understand by the people of his time, as well as by some of today. His compatriots were wondering how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. Instead of correcting his speech, Jesus even made it harder by repeating that unless they eat his flesh and drink his blood they cannot have life within them.

Such words would not mean only a spiritual food that Jesus would give to his followers or a symbolic language that Jesus used, as some pretend to say. A serious meditation of this text shows clearly that there is identification between the bread Jesus gives and his own flesh. The bread he gives, gives life in the same way as does his person. That is what the Jews have understood and that is why they started quarrelling among themselves about Jesus' sayings.

We have to remember, however, that any time Jesus was misunderstood, he directly corrected his listeners, like in the case of the death of Lazarus mistaken as sleeping by his disciples. Another case is about Nicodemus who was wondering how he could go back in the womb of his Mom and be born again while Jesus was talking about baptism in the Spirit.

The silence of Jesus in the present case shows that he meant what he said and they should take it literally as it was. That would not have been otherwise anyway, because according to the Hebrew anthropology, flesh, body, blood stand for the whole person and not for a part of him. Then, we understand why Jesus could say, “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 that sense, the point of the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus aims at reminding us that Jesus is entirely, and 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”. So, 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. At the same time, because Christ we receive in the Eucharist is alive, he gives life to our body too so that even when we die, we can live with him.

Moreover, 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 and for all on the cross for our salvation. That is why the Eucharist is concomitant to all times, all spaces and all generations.

The Eucharist realizes the communion with our Lord Jesus and with our brothers and sisters. It has a double sense of making present in time the sacrifice of the cross and of maintaining our union with Christ through our unity with our brothers and sisters. 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. 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 through our communion with one another. But, there is always this important question we have to answer: How can we show our unity as disciples of Christ and inside the Church, if we neglect to work toward the unity of our families and of our fellows from whom we are estranged? Let us ask the Lord to give us his life as we receive him in the Blessed Sacrament! May God bless you all!

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



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