

## **Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ B/2012**

All the readings of this solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ talk about the importance of the covenant that God concluded with his people. They invite us to realize that it was that covenant which God made anew in Jesus Christ by accepting the offering of his death on the cross. Therefore, Jesus is not only the mediator of the new covenant, but he is also our high priest who offered his own body and blood on the cross for the salvation of mankind.

The first reading of the book of Exodus recalls the conclusion of the covenant between God and Israel, and what Moses did in order to bring the people to give its consent to it. In fact, after the people had accepted everything of what God told them, Moses erected an altar to God and offered him a sacrifice. He took a half of the blood of the animals of offering and splashed the altar. He also took another half of the blood and sprinkled on the people as a sign of their covenant with God.

What is behind this text is the idea that all-powerful God is a partner to human beings. Therefore, he is able to strike a deal with his creatures by entering the covenant with them. Another idea is that, although the initiative of the covenant comes from God, human beings have a big part to play in it by respecting their commitment towards God as well as the stipulations of the law. The text tries also to justify the importance of the sacrifice in the temple and the relevance of the priesthood in situating them in the framework of the covenant between God and his people.

That is the reason why the Letter to the Hebrews insists in presenting the coming of Christ into the world as aimed at correcting the sacrifice of the temple and at offering of Jesus' his own body and blood for the redemption of the world. In the same way, it presents Jesus' sacrifice as far superior to all those offered before him. It is for the same reason that it salutes Christ as the mediator of a new covenant who, through his death on the cross, has delivered us from transgression and opened for us an eternal inheritance in heaven.

All that helps us understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it focuses on the Last Supper through which Christ offered his body and blood for our salvation. First of all, the Gospel describes Jesus' plan for the preparation for the Passover. It equally shows what the disciples and Jesus' host did in order to make the Passover successful.

Finally, the Gospel describes the celebration of the Passover by Jesus and his disciples. It shows that while they were eating Jesus took a piece of bread and gave it to his disciples declaring that it was his body. In the same way, he gave them a cup of wine declaring that it was the blood of the covenant which will be poured out for many.

What do we learn from these readings? The first thing we learn is about the reality of the Eucharist. In order to understand the deep meaning of the Eucharist, let us start from the interpretation of sacrifice as presented in the Old Testament.

In fact, at the last Supper Jesus uses almost the same words, as in the covenant between God and Israel, in order to explain his death on the cross as the establishment of a New Covenant between God and humanity.

As the Gospels relates: Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples declaring that it was his body. In the same way, he took the cup and after the blessing, he gave it to his disciples declaring that it was his blood of the covenant.

In this process, Jesus identifies himself with the holocausts of the sacrifice by means of which the old covenant was established. His body and his blood offered under the signs of bread and wine signify the total immolation of his life for the salvation of the world. That is why, when the bread and wine are consecrated during the Mass, they become the body and the blood of Christ in response to Jesus' commandment: "Do this in memory of me".

One of the consequences to draw from such a statement is that, though the appearance of the bread and wine does not change when they are consecrated, we have in them the hidden presence of the body and the blood of Jesus. This is a mystery that happens through the power of the Holy Spirit and which makes the species of bread and wine the sacramental body and blood of Christ.

In that perspective, what we receive at the altar as bread and wine is an outward sign of the inner and mysterious activity of Jesus operating within them in order to give life to the world. That is why whenever the Eucharist is celebrated, Jesus continues to offer his body and blood as he did two thousand years ago.

The second point I want to highlight is about the importance of the process of identification. In fact, in the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus identifies himself with the lamb of the holocaust. As the blood of the animals was used in order to make straight the people before God, so was the blood of Christ offered on the cross for the salvation of the world.

In that perspective, to eat and drink at the table of the Eucharist is not only to receive Christ and to be united with Him, but it is also to be invited to reproduce in our own lives the sacrifice of Christ. That is why the feast of the body and blood of Christ reminds us that every good change in the world is a fruit of an accepted sacrifice.

After all, without sacrifice, we cannot expect something good coming out of us. That is why, we have to remember that any time we toil to improve the living conditions of our fellow human beings, we shed our blood like Christ. In that sense, to work hard in providing a better living standard for our families and our society is to imitate Christ and his love for us. We should never come to the Christ in the Eucharist by overlooking the price it requires from us.

Let us pray, then, that through the reception of the Eucharist we might be united with Christ. May we give up our lives for the good of our brothers and sisters at the example of Christ! May God bless you all!

**Exodus 24: 3-8; Hebrews 9: 11-15; Mark 14: 12-16, 22-26**



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