

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ C/2013

The readings of this solemnity of the most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord talk about the Eucharist as our spiritual food along the journey of life. They invite us to see in the bread and the wine of Eucharist a true sustenance that gives life us to the world for our eternal salvation.

The first reading recalls the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek. It shows that Melchizedek was both king and a priest of God. At this title, when Abraham returned from war, Melchizedek offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for Abraham's victory over his enemies. Abraham, in turn, acknowledged his blessing by giving a tenth of the recaptured booty as a tithe to Melchizedek.

What is behind this text is the idea that God blesses human beings with success in their enterprises. Another idea is the recommendation that because God is at the source of human success, human beings have to be thankful to him. The last idea is about the particular role the priests play as a bridge between God and his people.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus feeds more than five thousand people with just five loaves and two fish. First of all, the Gospel says that Jesus taught the crowd and healed those who were sick among them. When evening came, his apostles approached him and suggested to dismiss the crowd so that each may go to look for food and a place to spend the night.

In reaction, Jesus invited his apostles to find themselves the food for the crowd. Unfortunately, the apostles retorted that they had only five loaves and two fish, which was nothing with regard to the number of people. Then, in an astonishing move, Jesus ordered his apostles to make the crowd sit down in groups of about fifty.

After that, Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, blessed them and gave them to the disciples to give to the crowd. They all ate and were satisfied. In the end, the disciples picked twelve wicker baskets of leftover fragments.

What do we learn from today's readings? The first thing I want to highlight is the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. In fact, the way St Paul describes the tradition that has been handed on to him makes of the Eucharist the commemoration of the last supper of Jesus and the perpetuation of his sacrifice of the cross.

As he says, "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 also, the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me".

In fact, after having blessed the bread and the wine, Jesus bluntly said, "This is my body"... "This is my blood". As the words stand, he did not say, this is my bread and this is my wine, but rather my body and my blood.

In that perspective, we understand that to eat and to drink at the table of the Eucharist is to receive Christ, and to be united with him. In fact, after the consecration, the bread and wine we offer in the mass become the body and blood of Christ. They are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the sacrifice of self-immolation of his life that Jesus realized once on the cross. That is why St Paul says that, "as often as you

eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes” again.

Moreover, as Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and will be tomorrow, what he did two thousand years ago remains perpetually present to all the times and all the epochs. In this way, whenever the Eucharist is celebrated in his remembrance, Jesus continues to offer his body and blood for the salvation of the world as he did long time ago.

The second thing I want to highlight is the importance of Eucharist for our Catholic community. Unlike the Protestant churches for which the Eucharist is a simple memory of Jesus, the Eucharist is, for us, the center of our life and the point of convergence of all our pastoral activities. In fact, there is no liturgical act in the life of the Church that is celebrated without the Eucharist. There is no celebration of sacrament that is concluded without the Eucharist.

Why is it so? It is so, first of all, because in its foundation the Eucharist is closely related to the sacrifice of the cross by which Jesus has brought salvation to the world. In fact, it was at the last supper before he died that Jesus took the bread and gave to his disciples saying, “This is my body”. In the same way, he took a cup filled with wine and gave it to his disciples saying, “This is my blood”. In that sense, by offering the Eucharist, we not only commemorate the sacrifice of self-immolation by which we have been saved, but we also actualize in our time what Jesus did in order to save us.

Second, from the point of view of loyalty to Jesus, the celebration of the Eucharist is a way of showing our obedience to Jesus. In fact, when we read the bible, we find that Jesus recommends to his disciples a lot of things they should do for their relationship with the Father or their fellows. For instance, he tells them how they have to address God in their prayer. In the same way, he tells them what they have to do for their neighbors, etc.

But for the Eucharist, this is the only place where Jesus asks of his disciples something to be done for him: “Do this in remembrance of me”. In that sense, by celebrating the Eucharist, not only we show that we take seriously the request of our Lord by obeying him, but we also show we want to remain faithful to him.

In this feast of the most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord, let us long for the food of heaven that Jesus alone can give. As the physical food nourishes the body, let us be open to the Eucharist and receive Jesus for the healing of our souls. Let us ask Jesus to heal our doubt and increase our faith in his real presence in the Eucharist. May God bless you all!

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



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