

Most Holy and Body of Christ B2018

All the readings of this solemnity of Corpus Christi talk about the reality of the body and blood of Christ. They show that Christ is the true food for the world, because only he can satisfy the hunger and the thirst that people have. They invite us to long for the food that sustains us in life.

The first reading describes the Covenant that God concludes with the people of Israel through the hands of Moses. It shows how Moses brought the people to give their consent to the ordinances of the Lord. It also shows how the people offered to the Lord Holocaust and sacrifices of animals for peace. Finally, the text highlights the way Moses concluded the Covenant with God by using the blood of sacrificed animals.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is a partner of human beings. There is also the idea that, though the initiative of the Covenant comes from God, human beings have to respond to it by respecting the stipulations of the law. The last idea is related to the importance of the sacrifice and the justification of the priesthood in the framework of the Covenant between God and his people.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it speaks of the last supper Jesus had with his disciples. In fact, the Gospel starts with the mention of some disciples sent by Jesus ahead of him in order to prepare for him a place for the celebration of Passover. Then, it shows what the disciples and the hosts of Jesus did in order to make the Passover successful. Finally, the Gospel describes the event of the celebration of the Passover and the conclusion of the Covenant through the shedding of his blood.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. However, in order to better understand the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, it is good to make reference first of all to the celebration of Passover. In fact, according to the book of Exodus 12, once the Israelites were set free from the bondage in Egypt, they received clear recommendations from God through the mouth of Moses about what that they should do in order to celebrate and commemorate each year the event of their freedom from Egypt.

In the collective memory of the sons of Israel, Passover played a big role, because beyond the fact that it was a commemoration of exodus from Egypt, it was also the celebration of the establishment of Israel as the people of God. Originally, the rite of Passover consisted of a meal in which a lamb was slaughtered and its blood smeared on the doorpost to ward off the destroying angel who slew the first born of the Egyptians. By doing so, it was as though God passed a covenant with his people and vouched for their protection.

Without losing that meaning, Passover became, over the years, the national feast of the reliving of the Exodus and a remembrance of the saving power of God. In that sense, the whole attention was on God, as the savior of his people, and the feast itself, though referring to an event of the past, was significantly ever present in the collective memory.

This recall is very important because it was at the occasion of this commemoration that Jesus will have the last supper with his disciples. However, there are three things he will do differently.

First, with regard to the content of the meal: instead of the meat of the lamb, he takes bread, breaks it and gives to the disciples to eat by saying that it is his body. Second, with regard to the blood of the lamb: he takes a cup of wine, blesses it and enjoins his disciples to drink saying that it is his blood of the Covenant and which will be shared for many. Third, instead of a reference to the past, Jesus makes the Passover present now-in-his body, because now it refers to him as though he has assumed the place of the lamb of holocaust.

As it appears, in the celebration of the last supper, there is a process of identification of Jesus with the lamb of Passover. As the lamb was killed and its blood used in order to save the sons of Israel, so is the blood of Christ poured out for the salvation of the world. The blood refers not to a part of Jesus, but to his whole person. The body refers not to a part of Jesus, but to his whole person.

Thus, when we receive the Eucharistic body and blood, we receive entirely Jesus who is present in them in order to give us life. 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.

Because, we are dealing with the process of identification of Jesus to the lamb of Passover, when the bread and wine are consecrated during the Mass, they become the body and the blood of Christ in response to Jesus' command "Do this in memory of me".

Moreover, 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 as the lamb of Passover.

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; Hebrew 9: 11-15; Mark 14: 12-16, 22-26

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