

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ A2023

With the feast of Corpus Christi we celebrate today, our Lord gives us a great opportunity to deepen the mystery of his presence in the Eucharist, which is the center of the life of the Church and our own life as his disciples.

This feast is rooted in what God did for the people of Israel many years in the past when they left Egypt. As they were sojourning in the desert, they were diminished by hunger and thirst. But, God came to their rescue by giving them manna for food and water for drink.

That action was seen by all as the manifestation of God's bounty and generosity. The manna, in particular, was seen as the symbol of the survival of the nation without which it would have perished. That is why in the popular imagination of the Jews, the manna meant a lot. Therefore, it would be unacceptable, and even a blasphemy, that anyone would speak of the manna in a disrespectful way. And yet, that is exactly what our Lord did by comparing the manna that their ancestors ate in the desert to the bread he gives.

Before continuing, let us raise a question. Why did God let the children of Israel wander in the desert? The reason is very simple: He wanted to teach them that not on bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. In other words, God wanted them to learn out of experience of life that their survival depends on him alone. That is why Moses recommended them not to forget God who brought them out of Egypt and saved them from disasters and calamities.

Such a reality reminds us even today that our survival and our success depend on God alone. Of course, we are responsible for our life and our future. It is also true that if we do not do anything to succeed in life, no one will do it for us. However, even where we have worked hard, the success of our work is possible only because God has blessed us. That truth is what Psalm 127 highlights when it says: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who work labor in vain. Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch".

That dimension of a caring God and savior is what is behind the 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 Jesus says in the Gospel, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world".

These words were very difficult to grasp by the people of his time and even by some today. The Jews who heard him speaking were wondering how he could give them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. However, instead of correcting his speech, Jesus even made it harder by adding, "Unless you eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."

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

We have, however, to remember that anytime our Lord was misunderstood, he directly corrected his listeners, like in the case of the death of Lazarus mistaken as sleeping by his

disciples (John 11: 1-44). Another case is about Nicodemus who was wondering whether he has to go back in the womb of his Mom and be born again while Jesus was talking about Baptism in the Spirit (John 3: 1-20).

But in this case of bread of life, our Lord did not correct himself. His silence shows that he meant what he said and they should take it literally as it was and as they heard. That would not have been otherwise anyway, because according Hebrew anthropology, flesh, body and 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 drink 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 our Lord aims at reminding us that our Lord 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 our Lord. Our Lord gives himself to us in the Eucharistic bread and wine in order to maintain his life within us. By receiving the bread and the cup at the altar, we receive the body and the blood of our Lord.

Because our Lord is entirely 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 our Lord, we become one with him and are united with him. At the same time, because our Lord we receive in the Eucharist is alive, he gives life to our body so that even when we die, we can live with him.

By sharing the body and blood of our Lord in the Eucharist, we partake in the mystery of his life that he offered once and for all on the cross for our salvation. What we receive at the altar, as bread and wine, is an outward sign of an inward and mysterious activity of our Lord operating within them to give life to the world. Whenever and wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, Jesus continues to offer his body and blood in sacrifice as he did two thousand years ago.

The Eucharist realizes the communion with our Lord and with our fellows. 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 our Lord, we are challenged to show our unity with one another as a community of believers. We are reminded of the duty of solidarity with brothers and sister throughout the world who have no food. There is an important question we have to answer today: How can we show our unity as Disciples of Christ inside the Church, if we neglect to work toward unity in our families and those from whom we are estranged? Let us ask our Lord to give us his life as we receive him in the Blessed Sacrament. Let us open our hearts to the grace of the Eucharist!

Deuteronomy 8: 2-3, 14b-16a; 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17; John 6: 51-58



Homily Date: June 11, 2023
© 2023 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20230611homily