

## **Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ May 29, 2016**

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

Today, we are celebrating the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. This special Feast is celebrated in remembrance of Jesus who gave His life for our salvation and commanded us to celebrate the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in his memory. The Feast owes its existence to Blessed Juliana of Liege, who began devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in around 1230. Largely through her insistence, in 1264 Pope Urban IV commanded its observance by the universal church. The Feast sums up three important confessions about our Faith. First is that God became physically present in the person of Christ, True God and True Man. Secondly, God continues to be present in His people as they form the Mystical Body of Christ in his church. And thirdly, the presence of God under the form of bread and wine is made available to us on the altar at Mass and preserved there for our nourishment and worship. Our liturgy today recalls the scriptural origins of this devotion. In the first reading of today we hear of Abraham asking his high priest, Melchizedek, to offer sacrifice to give thanks for a major victory that he had won. Instead of the usual sacrificial offering, the priest offered bread and wine, the full significance of which came to light at the Last Supper. St Paul in the second reading points to the importance of the Eucharist as a reminder of Christ's passion and death finally leading to the building of the mystical body. In the Gospel we have the miracle of the multiplication of loaves where Jesus generously gives food to the people and makes them partake in the thanksgiving meal.

The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is in accordance with the command of Jesus to us, to celebrate as a community in his memory, the last meal, where he gave us the Holy Eucharist. During His ministry on earth, Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from Heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world." While these words Jesus offered his life for the sins of the humanity. During the Last Supper Jesus taught His followers the manner in which the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist should be celebrated. He also told them that He would be physically present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist and will be with them till the end of times. But his sacrifice was complete on Calvary when he shed his last drop of blood and water for the sake of humanity. This offering is a gift and every gift involves the giver and the receiver. It is sacrifice to the giver and gift to the receiver. Jesus here uses the symbol of a MEAL to make us realize his presence. Every meal has its social dimension. Each and every celebration of ours, religious or secular, ends with a meal. A meal unites people, holds the family together and builds a community. Jesus uses this simple celebration of a meal to give us his closeness to us. It is built up on the idea of a family, where everyone shares the common food and all are equal.

The first reading taken from the Book of Genesis tells us of Abraham's journey of faith. God had promised Abraham, a dynasty and abundant land. The chapter tells of the capture of his nephew Lot and Abraham fights the kings and gets his release. On returning victorious from a battle against four invading kings from the East and had

taken off much booty, Abraham meets Melchizedek, the king and Priest of Salem, which later became Jerusalem. The name Melchizedek means, "King of righteousness." He accepted from the king of Salem not only bread and wine for the invigoration of the exhausted warriors, but a priestly blessing as well. In return, Abraham gave the priest a tenth of all his booty. This was a definite sign that Abraham recognized Melchizedek's god and submitted to the royal priesthood of Melchizedek. There is some sacrificial significance intended by this action. It was not an ordinary meal offered to Abraham but a meal of thanksgiving. The bread and wine could have been the sign of the alliance between the two persons. As a priest Melchizedek asked his god to bless the stranger with whom he had built a new bond.

Every Eucharist takes place in the context of a community. In this Communal Sacrificial Meal celebrated by the Community, we have the presence of Jesus who is the victim, the altar and the priest. He offers himself to the Father as a special offering for the reconciliation of the world. The Eucharist is offered and shared in a community as a fulfilment of the final mission of Jesus to save the world. In this communal sharing there is no difference of caste and creed and language as all partakers are equal. Several elements are involved in the word Eucharist. It is symbolic, it is a sacrifice, it is a meal, it is a memorial meal, and it is done in the community and is celebrated by the church. God is present in the world and the universe in several ways that are symbolic. Several images were given in the Old Testament, such as the cloud, mountain, thunder, lightning, wind, tent, Temple, fire and so on. People believed that God was there and they worshipped him. In the Letter to the Hebrews chapter one, we are given the ultimate symbol of God's presence, namely Jesus himself. God is present in creation and in every activity. But he is especially present to us in the Eucharist. As we break the bread at the Eucharistic table we ask the grace to be worthy of the Lord's mystery and be his instruments to bring his unity and charity in the world.

In today's second reading St Paul gives us the first detailed account of the Lord's Supper and the Institution of the Eucharist. He tells them how Lord Jesus at the Last Supper took bread and broke it and gave it to the disciples saying "This is my Body which is for you. Do it in remembrance of me." He did the same with the cup of wine telling them: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this and as often you do this do it in remembrance of me." Paul tells them that bread becomes the Body of Jesus and wine becomes his Blood. He also tells them of the Eucharist because of the practical reasons. The church at Corinth had various problems with unity, particularly at the level of economic status. Apparently people in the early church often brought their own food to meetings of the congregation, which would likely have met in the larger homes of the wealthy members. They would eat an Agape Meal together, mixing a communal meal with a celebration of the Lord's Supper. The problem in Corinth was that the rich would go ahead and eat without waiting for others -- and not even making sure that the poor in the congregation had eaten or even brought food with them. The poor probably made up a large portion of the congregation, many of them slaves. By eating without the poor, the rich showed utter disdain for their brothers and sisters, an offence against Christian unity. He tells them that there is no division in Christ's

Community as he shared one bread and one cup and formed a true community. He tells them of the importance of the Eucharist in the community building.

The Gospel of today tells us of the compassion of Jesus. Jesus was a great preacher and many were ready to follow him to any distance in order to listen to him. Jesus indeed was very human and he was greatly concerned about those people who had followed him to the desert place to listen to him and he wants to take care of them. His heart moved with pity for them. He asks the disciples to take care of them and he does the miracle of loaves to fill them with the necessary physical food. The miracle also shows the abundance of God's love towards each individual. Each person ate and each had more than enough and plenty was left over. This abundance reminds us of God feeding the Israelites in the desert with manna. The gospel tells us that the group that had followed him to the desert received from Jesus plenty to eat.

The institution of the Lord's Supper is the ultimate act of love of Jesus towards his disciples and all others who believe in him. The irony of this setting is that, previous to this action, Jesus had announced to his disciples that one of them was about to betray him. The intimacy of table fellowship was sharply contrasted with the act of betrayal by one from among them. Jesus had the Passover meal with the disciples but the details are not given to us. But we have the institution of the Eucharist during the meal. Mark tells us that as they were eating, Jesus took some unleavened bread, said the traditional blessing, broke it and distributed it among his disciples. "Take this," he said, "this is my body." It is not just his physical body but his whole person and everything that Jesus stood for through his life, words and actions. As he gave them the bread he identified it with his mission and vision of life. Again, they did not eat as individuals but, as one united group, sharing the one loaf among them all. Similarly, Jesus took the cup of wine, said a prayer of thanksgiving over it, gave it to them and again they all drank from the one cup. He told them that it is his blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many. The word blood expresses the whole person of Jesus.

Jesus gives his disciples the Eucharist. Eucharist means thanksgiving and blessing. We express our gratitude to God for all the gratuitous gifts God has given us in Jesus and we offer back to him the gratitude in the form of Bread and wine. Eucharist means a Blessing. Blessing actually means prayer of praise and glorification for all the Lord God has done for us in Jesus. It is a meal shared by the community in the name of Jesus. It is a sacrificial meal, meaning it is an offering to God as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus uses here the symbol of a simple meal to show his presence to us and chooses to remain in the form of simple bread and wine, a poor person's meal. Here we should emphasise more the community dimension of the celebration of the Eucharist which is often missing. We tend to see "going to Mass" very much in individual terms. Eucharist indeed is a communal celebration where we share in the one bread. A priest only presides and leads the community in the offering of the sacrifice.

Eucharist in the church can be understood as a communal sacrificial meal, offered by the community of believers along with the priest, to the heavenly Father together with Jesus for the remission of sins and as an offering of gratitude and thanksgiving. The

Eucharist is essentially and of its very nature a community action in which every person present is expected to be an active participant and the priest presides over it. We are here, on the one hand, recalling what makes us Christians in the first place - our identification with the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. And that identification with Jesus is expressed not through a one-to-one relationship with him but in a community relationship with him present in all those who call themselves Christian. We relate to him through his Risen Body, which is the whole community bearing his name. There is no place in Christianity for individualism. It is a horizontal faith: we go to God with and through those around us. That is the reason why Paul asks the community to share the meal together because Jesus broke the bread and shared, saying that it is his body. Same thing he did with wine, saying it is his blood. Through this sharing we become one with him.

It is a sacrificial meal, where Jesus is the victim, the altar and the priest. He offers himself to the Father as a special offering for the reconciliation of the world. It is offered in a community with no difference of caste and creed and language. It is a fulfilment of the final mission of Jesus to save the world. Therefore let us prepare ourselves to receive the Lord worthily and as we break the bread at the Eucharistic table we ask the grace to be worthy of the Lord's mystery and be his instruments to bring his unity and charity in the world. As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us be thankful to the Lord Jesus for His Body and Blood that assures us our salvation. And let us remember throughout the week that as new creations, we are called to feed on the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist so the Body and Blood of Christ may transform us in His likeness. The feast invites us to remember the connection between communion and community.

The Eucharist is a gift, not just to be adored and revered, but also to be consumed, digested and lived by every Christian. What were once the simple gifts of bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of our Saviour - the new covenant between God and mankind. It is not a private gift, but a communal one. When the priest holds up the consecrated Host and the cup of Wine and says, " This is My Body - this is My Blood ", he is also saying, for Jesus, "you are my body... you are my blood!" Jesus gives us His Body and Blood so that He might live in us and so that we, then, might become life for the world. But God is always new, always challenging. Each new circumstance of our life should lead us to a new understanding of His goodness and love. As we grow older, God should become younger for us.

If we understand and accept the mystery of Eucharist, then we should realize that we are one in the spirit with all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. There should be a bond of love and welcome between them and us that should help us overcome all other differences. Diversity should not be an obstacle or a threat to us. We should realize how the church of Christ is enriched by the great variety of ideas and thoughts - and dreams - that are brought together as we come to celebrate and to be nourished in the Eucharist. Today's feast is a witness to this. Our oneness in faith and love is the strongest evidence that Jesus and His spirit are in fact working among us to bring all people together in the peace and justice of God's kingdom. It is the testament

of a shared "communion" in which we are all aware of our commitment to "be" the body and blood of Christ in all we do.

One day a man went to the priest and said that he could not believe that the bread on the altar can be transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. The priest said that it is really easy. We all eat so much of bread and other materials and they are quickly changed into our flesh and blood. It is a miracle of nature. The man was not convinced. He asked how the huge body of Jesus can be contained in a small host. The priest took him out and showed him the scenery. He asked him how this entire scene can be contained in a little eye ball and all is visible to him. The man still would not accept it all. He said how one Jesus can be found in every church at the same time. The priest then brought a small mirror and asked him to look into his own image there. Then he quietly dropped the mirror and it broke into hundred pieces. He then asked the man to look into each piece and asked how he was now seen in hundred pieces and he is still the same. The man was now convinced that Eucharist is truly a miracle and Jesus was found everywhere body and blood.

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