

Year B
Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (Corpus Christi)

Today, we are celebrating the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, or known as the Feast of *Corpus Christi*. By celebrating this feast we are professing that in the Holy Eucharist, in the consecrated Bread and Wine, Christ is truly and substantially present, not in a symbolic or a spiritual sense, but in a more literal, physical, and sacramental sense, Jesus is really present in the Eucharist.

This is why we have a deep reverence and respect for the Eucharist. Indeed when we bow down or worship the Blessed Sacrament, we are bowing down and worshipping Christ himself and not a wafer, we worship **not him whom the baker hath made, but the maker of all things.**

In our Gospel for today Jesus clearly says “*Take, this is my body*”... as he gave the Eucharist to his disciples, and afterward “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many*” Hence, when we eat the flesh of Jesus and drink his blood in Eucharistic Communion, we share in his very life, a life poured out for all on the cross. As we gratefully receive this food of eternal life, we are called in turn to pour out our lives in loving service to our brothers and sisters.

Gathering together to break bread and share the cup is the most ancient practice of the Church. Like many other practices, gathering for the Eucharist has gone through a significant evolution throughout the centuries, from that of the last supper to our current liturgy; nevertheless, the central belief of the Eucharist is preserved in the Catholic and Orthodox expressions of the Christian Faith.

Today's feast of the Body and Blood of Christ enables the Eucharist to be set in a broader scriptural context than is possible on Holy Thursday. This year the wider context appears in readings unified around the theme of the 'blood of the covenant.' – So let us understand or refresh our memory of the Eucharist as Sacrifice - A theme that runs through the whole of the Salvation History.

The First Reading from Exodus 24:3-8 describes the solemn ritual in which the Sinai covenant was sealed. Moses has received the Torah (Law) from God and put it in writing. In the context of a sacrificial ritual, he reads out the law to the people and, following their consent to abide by all the commandments in the Torah, he sprinkles them with the blood from the sacrifices, saying 'This is the blood of the Covenant that the Lord has made with you.' - In this way the covenant that bound God to Israel and Israel to God is formally ratified and sealed through blood. Of course, the blood in question is

the blood of animal sacrifices. But blood is taken to be a symbol of the life force. Hence its significance.

The First Covenant had an annual ritual, celebrated on the Day of Atonement, when the barriers to the covenant relationship created by the accumulated sins of the people over the past year were wiped away by God. On this one day of the year, the High Priest entered the most sacred part of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, and sprinkled the blood of a sacrificed animal upon the cover over the Ark of the Covenant (Lev 16:11-16). This ritual enacted God's wiping away the sin of the people and the renewal of the covenant relationship. The extract from the Letter to the Hebrews in the Epistle (Heb 9:11-15) portrays Christ's saving action in terms of this ritual while insisting on its vastly superior efficacy and the fact that, unlike the older rite, it is 'once for all,' needing no repetition.

The blood is not now the blood of animals but the precious blood of Jesus himself. And the sanctuary that he has entered is not the earthly Holy of Holies but the sanctuary of heaven itself, which he has entered in resurrection and exaltation to God's right hand. **Thus it is important to understand that, each time we celebrate the Eucharist it is not a new sacrifice, unlike the annual Day of the Atonement, but an entering into the only sacrifice of Jesus**

sacramentally. It is the same Pascal Mystery that we keep entering, making present, and celebrating every time we participate in the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic traditions of the Gospels and Paul's account in 1 Cor 11:23-25, carry further this association of blood and covenant. Drawing on Jeremiah's prophecy of a 'new covenant', they see the sprinkling of Christ's blood on Calvary as God's establishment of a 'new covenant' for a renewed People of God. On the night before he died, Christ shared a final Passover meal with his disciples. Modifying the Passover ritual, he impressed a special meaning on the death he was to undergo the following day: the shedding of his blood, symbolized in the cup of wine, would be the inauguration of a 'new covenant in his blood.'

Though the command to repeat the Eucharistic gestures ('Do this in memory of me') does not appear in Mark's account set down for today's Gospel as it does in Luke (22:19) and Paul (1 Cor 11:24, 25), the inauguration of a ritual to be repeated is clearly implied. When believers of subsequent generations recall and repeat what the Lord did at that Last Supper, they place themselves in a situation similar to that of the Israelites whom Moses sprinkled with blood at the ratification of the first covenant. They appropriate to themselves all the saving benefits associated with the 'new covenant' established in Christ's blood. They commit themselves anew to abide by the

way of life required by that covenant, a life of obedient love modelled on the loving service of Christ.

Thus the Eucharist also reminds each of us to be a Eucharistic person. Four main actions take place in the Eucharistic Sacrifice – firstly we offer the ordinary bread and wine to the Lord, then the Priest Consecrates the ordinary bread and wine which becomes the body and blood of Christ, then the bread is broken, and finally, it is given to the people of God as food. This should be the pattern of our Christian lives. First, we bring our ordinary lives to the Lord and offer our ordinary lives to God, when we offer our lives to God, then the Lord blesses us and consecrates us, as he does with the bread and wine, and then he leads us through a breaking process to bring his plans come true in us, just like the bread of the Eucharist is broken, unless we go through this breaking we are not able to be given for others. We need to grow in humility, wisdom, and Christian maturity that can only come through breaking and suffering so that we can be used by God as nourishment for others. This is the Eucharistic pattern of our lives – offered, consecrated, broken, and given.

The Eucharist catches up with this sense of the divine ‘service’ performed by Christ upon the cross: one innocent person offered, Consecrated, Broken and Given up to death to free ‘many’ from the captivity and condemnation associated with sin. The Eucharist, then, continually re-enacts that loving, costly

outreach of God in Christ to draw human beings into the life-giving and everlasting covenant, and invites each of us to be more part of this outreach of God.