

ON BEING A LOVING, CARING, VIBRANT MEMBER OF CHRIST'S BODY

May 25, 2008

Corpus Christi Sunday

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"I am the living bread that came down from heaven, says the Lord; whoever eats this bread will live forever." [Jn 6:31]

A. DEUTERONOMY 8:2-3,14-16 -- The Context. This book covers events at the end of 40 years of wandering as Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land. It was written to mind the people of God's great love for them and that they must chose fidelity to the covenant in order to reap the benefits. **Today's portion** is from Moses speech announcing the Law and describing how the people are to live. **V 8:3 not by bread alone** is quoted by Jesus in Mt 4:4 & means: **God takes care of those who love him even when natural means seem to fail them.** [TCB 197]

B. PSALM 147:12-15,19-20 --The Context This portion exhorts the holy city to recognize it has been recreated and **made the place of disclosure for God's word, a word as life-giving as water.** [TCB p 746]

C. I CORINTHIANS 10:16-17—The Context: This letter was written by Paul around 56 A.D from Ephesus, to address factions, moral disorders and answers to Corinthians' questions . **Today's text** comes from a warning against idolatry. One cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons. **The cup of blessing is a participation in the blood of Christ.** [TCB, p 264]

D. JOHN 6:51-59---The Context: The author is probably a disciple of the apostle John, son of Zebedee. It was composed around 90 A.D. [DB, p. 446-450] **In today's pericope** Jesus identifies himself with **the bread of life that comes down from heaven, sent by God.** The first level of meaning in the symbol, bread, is that of faith: in God and in Jesus. Jesus is the very source of (eternal) life for Christians. **Through him one develops a whole new relationship with God.** That relationship brings eternal life to the believer. [TCB RG p. 373]

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

What actually do we mean by the Body and Blood of Christ? Three levels are distinguished:

a. The meaning of today's Gospel: *"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you ... Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."*

Here the Gospel is not primarily speaking about the Eucharist or "Holy Communion". **To eat the flesh of Jesus and drink his blood is not to be taken literally.** The Jews were appalled at his words. If one were to take his words literally, Jesus seemed to be promoting cannibalism. The Jews, to this day, do not drink blood; it must be removed from any animal that is to be eaten.

What then does Jesus actually mean? We are to eat his flesh and drink his blood in the sense that **we are to assimilate totally into our very being all that he teaches, his vision, his values, his understanding of the meaning and purpose of life.** His thinking is our thinking, his dreams are our dreams... total union with him in our way of thinking and living.

b. The second level is when we speak of the Body and Blood of Christ today. We do not mean the physical body that died on the Cross or the blood that flowed from the wounds. **Today, the Body of the Risen Jesus also includes all his followers united in Christian communities all over the world.** Jesus is the head of the Body and we, each with our unique and diverse gifts and talents, are its members. And we only truly belong to Christ when we are consciously and **actively participating members of that Body, loving, serving and caring for each other.**

c. Thirdly, we have the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. Without the first two this last has little or no meaning. So, if people who claim to be followers of Christ but come to the Eucharist in a purely passive frame of mind or without any sense of being a community and being members of one Body, then they are going to benefit very little from the Eucharist.

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What do we do at Mass? We basically do two things:

a. First, we remember and we give thanks. The word 'Eucharist' (eucharistia) comes from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving. We remember, above all, everything that God has done for us in Jesus Christ through his life, his teaching, his suffering, death and resurrection. But we also remember and give thanks for all our own personal experiences of being touched by God's love in our lives. It is a time to count our blessings.

b. Secondly, we come together to celebrate being a community and a fellowship in Christ. The Mass, by itself, does not make a community. **It presupposes a community already existing.** It is the celebration and the strengthening of that community. We don't just "go to" Mass, or "hear" Mass, or "attend" Mass as individuals. We are not here simply to observe the Third Commandment, "*Keep holy the Sabbath day.*" We don't come to the Eucharist the way we go to see a play or a movie. We don't come to be entertained. **We don't come just to get something, but to give something, ourselves, to each other.**

The Mass is a sacrament. That means it is a sign pointing to something bigger than itself. That is why **the Mass is a measure of the quality of our fellowship and community.** **A living, vibrant community cannot have a bad Eucharist.** Where there is no real community there can be no real Eucharist, even though the church building is beautiful, the vestments are gorgeous and the choir sings the most heavenly music. Mass is not just a time for praying; **it is a time for celebrating community.** That cannot be done at home; we can only do that together.

Yet, everything we do at Mass emphasizes that it is a shared experience. We begin the Communion liturgy by saying together the Lord's Prayer, where we speak to God as our (not my) Father, where we ask him for our daily bread, where we ask for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, where we join hands together. And this is followed by the greeting of peace: a gesture of friendship, reconciliation, and forgiveness for all those around us before **we approach the table of unity and togetherness.**

If we are not already a community before we enter the church, we are not suddenly going to become one after we come in. If a parish consists only of providing Mass with nothing whatever happening outside of Mass, then that is basically a dead parish, and its Eucharist will be dead. A parish gets the Eucharist that its parishioners make. A good Eucharist is the sign of a living community. The more we become aware of Christ living and acting in and through us as his Body, the more meaningful will be our gathering around his table. [Frank Doyle, S.J.]

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

How well have I assimilated Jesus' teaching, vision & values into my life?

Am I a loving, serving, caring, vibrant member of Christ's Body in our parish?

At the Eucharist do I reach out to get to know parishioners whom I have not yet met?

How would I rate my effectiveness in welcoming others at & to our church?

[Sources: Scripture readings- *The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB), and its Reading Guide (RG); The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, [JSB] Jewish Publication Society; The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (JBC) 1968 edition; Dictionary of the Bible (DB), J.L.McKenzie, SJ; Daily Study Bible Series, John (DSBS), Wm Barclay; Sunday Scripture Reflections by Frank Doyle, SJ at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace>; Corpus Christi Sunday. [Compiled by Michael Hosemann].*