

MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST – C (June 19, 2022)

The second reading today is also the second reading for the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday every year—the day before Good Friday. St. Paul reminded the Corinthians and us that at that Last Supper Jesus blessed bread and wine, gave it to the apostles, and told them “this is my body...this cup is the new covenant in my blood”. This echoes what we read in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke in their accounts of the Last Supper. It is a most fitting reading for this feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ for it recounts the origin, the institution by Jesus himself, of the Eucharist.

This is one of those most basic of all mysteries and is at the very heart of our Catholic faith and life. Last weekend we observed Trinity Sunday to remind us of the foundation of our faith—that God is One, and that he exists in an eternal communion of love as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then we recall the next most important building block of our faith, the Incarnation. God the Son took on our human form, our own ‘flesh and blood’ existence when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. As St. John tells us in his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and dwelled among us” (John 1:1, 14). And today we recall the amazing truth that Jesus, that Word made flesh, continues to dwell among us in the Eucharist in which he feeds us with his true Body and Blood—no mere symbol or representation, but his tangible, visible Presence under what is only the outward appearance of bread and wine.

It is important for us to have this feast on our Church calendar to remind us of this incredible gift—incredible, because it is the gift that Jesus gives to us of himself. And this feast has become even more important for us at this time when an increasing number of those who think of themselves as Catholic do not believe that the Eucharist truly is the Body and Blood of Christ, but is rather simply a symbol or reminder of Jesus. The U.S. bishops recently approved and published a really good statement on this subject: “The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church”. Starting Monday I'm going to talk about a number of details from this document on my daily (Monday-Friday) video reflections (see the bulletin for where you can find them). For now, just a few highlights:

1. First of all, the bishops affirm clearly and without hesitation that the Eucharist gives us the Real Presence of Christ: “...in the Eucharist, bread and wine become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ without ceasing to appear as bread and wine to our five senses” (n. 21). When the priest repeats Jesus' words from the Last Supper over the bread and wine, those elements become the very Body and Blood of Jesus. The substance, the basic ‘stuff’ of that bread and wine, become his Body and Blood—all that is left of the bread and wine is their mere outward appearance. That is what we mean by ‘transubstantiation’.

Is this a challenging thing to believe? Of course it is! Do we fully understand or comprehend how this can be? Of course not! Welcome once again to the world of ‘mystery’—not in the sense of a mystery novel that we figure out by the end of the story, and not in the sense of something that we can't know anything about. In the religious or theological sense, rather, ‘mystery’ is something that we cannot know by human reason alone, but is instead revealed to us by God. And the Eucharist as the real Body and Blood of Christ has been revealed to us by Jesus

himself. The apostles and St. Paul among others handed on that belief from the very beginning of the Church's life and history. That belief is firmly and repeatedly attested to by the earliest saints and Church leaders to our own time and will be proclaimed by the Church until the end of time.

2. Second, the Body and Blood of Christ are made present to us in our celebration of the Eucharist or the Mass. It has been traditionally and accurately named the holy Sacrifice of the Mass because in this sacred action the one saving sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is made sacramentally present to us on our altars. As the bishops say: "The Eucharist 'makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior'...this sacrifice is made present ever anew, sacramentally perpetuated, in every community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister' (n. 16). It is not that we somehow 'repeat' Jesus' death on the Cross at every Mass or that he dies again and again at every Mass. Of course Jesus died once and only once on the Cross. Rather, we believe that that one sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross is made present to us in a very real yet hidden or sacramental way every time we celebrate the Eucharist, every time we offer the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Remember: God is not limited by time and space as we are. He can make present to us here and now something that happened long ago and in a place far away. Hard for us to understand? Of course it is! Impossible for it to be true? Of course not! Don't forget that, as Gabriel told Mary at the Annunciation, "nothing is impossible for God" (Lk 1:37).

3. Our belief in the Real Presence of Jesus is also the basis for our practice of Eucharistic Adoration—praying in the presence of Jesus exposed in the Blessed Sacrament. Bread and wine are consecrated during Mass and become his Body and Blood—but that Real Presence does not cease at the end of Mass. That is why we have our tabernacles as a sacred place to reserve the remaining consecrated Hosts; that's why the sanctuary candle burns there to remind us of his Presence there; that's why we genuflect or make some other sign of reverence when entering and leaving our pews or passing before the tabernacle. The bishops quote Pope Benedict XVI: "In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration'" (n. 33). As you know and as I remind you every month, we have monthly Eucharistic adoration here in Holy Rosary cluster—I strongly encourage you to come and spend some time with Jesus himself, truly present and exposed for our love and adoration on our altars. Give him your heart, your gratitude and your love; give him your concerns and fears, your frustrations; give him your... your everything. And let him give himself to you to embrace you with his merciful love.

St. (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta once said: "When you look at the crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host, you understand how much Jesus loves you now." That is what the Eucharist, the Mass is all about—it's all about Jesus. It's all about his indescribable love for us that led him to take the burden of our sins with him on the Cross. It's about his desire to remain with us and to actually feed and nourish us with his Most Holy Body and Blood to make us holy and to bring us into the closest possible union with him. Too much for our small hearts and minds to grasp? Of course it is! Too good to be true? Of course not...because it is true!