

Synopsis: The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ [C] (May 29)

Importance: 1) The last two precious gifts given to us by Jesus are the Holy Eucharist as our spiritual food on Holy Thursday and Jesus' mother Mary as our spiritual Mother on Good Friday 2) *Corpus Christi* the celebration of the abiding presence of a loving God as *Emmanuel* – God with us – in order to give collective thanks to our Lord for his living with us in the Eucharist. 3) The feast also gives us an occasion to learn more about the importance and value of the “Real Presence” so that we may appreciate and better and receive maximum benefit from the Sacrament.

We believe in the “Real Presence” of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist because 1) Jesus promised it after miraculously feeding the 5000. 2) Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist during his Last Supper. 3) Jesus commanded his disciples to repeat it in his memory. 4) “Nothing is impossible for God.”

We explain the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist by: the Aristotelian philosophical term “transubstantiation” which means that the *substance* of the consecrated bread and wine is changed to the *substance* of the risen Jesus' glorified Body and Blood by the action of the Holy Spirit, and its *accidents* (like color, shape, taste etc.), remain the same.

Scripture lessons: This year's readings for the feast emphasize the theme of Covenant blood because the ancient peoples sealed covenants with the blood of ritually sacrificed animals, and Jesus sealed his New Covenant with his own Blood shed on Calvary. Today's first reading describes how Moses, by sprinkling the blood of a sacrificed

animal on the altar and on the people, accepted the Covenant Yahweh proposed and made with His People. In the second reading, St. Paul affirms that Jesus sealed the New Covenant with his own Blood, thereby putting an end to animal sacrifices. Today's Gospel details how Jesus converted this ancient ritual into a Sacrament and sacrifice. Instead of the lamb's blood, Jesus offered his own Divine/human Body and Blood, and instead of sprinkling us with blood, he put it into our hands as Food: "*Take, this is my Body*" (He did not say "This represents my Body"), and "*This is my Blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many.*"

A Sacrament and a sacrifice: Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist both as a sacramental banquet and a sacrificial offering. As a Sacrament, **a)** the Eucharist is a visible sign that gives us God's grace and God's life and, **b)** as a meal, it nourishes our souls. As a sacrifice **a)** the Eucharistic celebration is a re-presentation or re-enactment of Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary, completed in His Resurrection. **b)** We offer Jesus' sacrifice to God the Father for the remission of our sins, using signs and symbols.

Life messages: **1)** Let us appreciate the "Real Presence" of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, by receiving Him with true repentance for our sins, due preparation and reverence.

2) Let us be Christ-bearers and conveyers: By receiving Holy Communion, we become Christ-bearers as Mary was, with the duty of conveying Christ to others at home and in the workplace, through love, mercy, forgiveness and humble and sacrificial service.

3) Let us offer our lives on the altar along with Jesus' sacrifice, asking pardon for our sins, expressing gratitude for the blessings we have received and presenting our needs and petitions on the altar.

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST [C] (May 29)

(Gen 14: 18-20; I Cor 11: 21-26; Lk 9: 11b-17)

Anecdote # 1: "I would like to say Mass." Dominic Tang, the courageous Chinese archbishop, was imprisoned for twenty-one years for nothing more than his loyalty to Christ and Christ's one, true Church. After he had spent five years of solitary confinement in a windowless, damp cell, he was told by his jailers that he could leave it for a few hours to do whatever he wanted. Five years of solitary confinement and he had a couple of hours to do what he wanted! What would it be? A hot shower? A change of clothes? Certainly a long walk outside? A chance to call or write to family? What would it be, the jailer asked him. "I would like to say Mass," replied Archbishop Tang. [Msgr. Timothy M. Dolan, *Priests of the Third Millennium* (2000), p. 216]. The Vietnamese Jesuit, Joseph Nguyen-Cong Doan, who spent nine years in labor camps in Vietnam, relates how he was finally able to say Mass when a fellow priest-prisoner shared some of his own smuggled supplies. "That night, when the other prisoners were asleep, lying on the floor of my cell, I celebrated Mass with tears of joy. My altar was my blanket, my prison clothes my vestments. But I felt myself at the heart of humanity and of the whole of creation." (*Ibid.*, p. 224). Today's feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus constantly calls us beyond ourselves to sacrificial love for others.

2: The greatest work of art in St. Peter's Basilica: One of the seminarians who gives tours of St. Peter's told me of an interesting incident. He was leading a group of Japanese tourists who knew absolutely nothing of our Faith. With particular care, he explained the great masterpieces of art, sculpture and architecture. He finally

concluded at the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, trying his best to explain quickly what it was. As the group dispersed, an elderly man, who had been particularly attentive stayed behind, and said, “Pardon me. Would you explain again this ‘Blessed Sacrament?’” Our student did, after which the man exclaimed, “Ah, if this is so, what is in this chapel is a greater work of art than anything else in this basilica.” (Msgr. Timothy M Dolan in *Priests of the Third Millennium*, 2000 p. 226). Today’s feast of *Corpus Christi* is intended to make us value and appreciate the worth of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

3: Communion on the moon: The Lord's Supper ensures that we can remember Jesus from any place. Apollo 11 landed on the moon on Sunday, July 20, 1969. Most remember astronaut Neil Armstrong's first words as he stepped onto the moon's surface: "*That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.*" But few know about the first meal eaten on the moon. Dennis Fisher reports that Buzz Aldrin, the NASA Astronaut had taken aboard the spacecraft a tiny pyx provided by his Catholic pastor. Aldrin sent a radio broadcast to Earth asking listeners to contemplate the events of the day and give thanks. Then, blacking out the broadcast for privacy, Aldrin read, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit." Then, silently, he gave thanks for their successful journey to the moon and received Jesus in the Holy Eucharist surrendering moon to Jesus. Next he descended on the moon and walked on it with Neil Armstrong. (Dan Gulley: "Communion on the Moon": *Our Daily Bread*: June/July/August, 2007). His actions remind us that in the Lord's Supper, God's children can share the life of Jesus from any place on Earth — and even from the moon. God is everywhere, and our worship should reflect this reality. In Psalm 139 we are told that wherever we go, God is intimately present with us. Buzz Aldrin celebrated that experience on the surface of the moon. Thousands of miles from earth, he took time to commune with the One who created, redeemed, and established fellowship with him. (Dennis Fisher)

(http://www.smithvillechurch.org/html/body_remembering_jesus_on_the_moon.html) & (<https://www.rbc.org/devotionals/our-daily-bread/2007/07/20/devotion.aspx>)

Introduction: The feast and its objectives: Today, we celebrate the solemn feast of *Corpus Christi*. It is three feasts in one: the feast of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the feast of the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the feast of the Real Presence of Jesus in this Sacrament. *Corpus Christi* is a doctrinal feast established for three purposes: 1) to give God collective thanks for Christ's abiding presence with us in the Eucharist and to honor Him there; 2) to instruct the people in the Mystery, Faith and devotion surrounding the Eucharist, and 3) to teach us to appreciate and make use of the great gift of the Holy Eucharist, both as a Sacrament and as a sacrifice. In the three-year cycle of the Sunday liturgy, there is a different theme each year for this *Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ*. In Cycle A the theme is the Eucharist as our food and drink; in Cycle B the emphasis is on the Eucharist as the sign of the covenant; and in Cycle C the theme focuses on the priesthood of Jesus. Although we celebrate the institution of the Holy Eucharist on Holy Thursday, the Church wants to emphasize its importance by a special feast, formerly called "*Corpus Christi*." It was Pope Urban IV who first extended the feast to the universal Church. This is one of the few feasts left in which we observe a procession and a sung "*Sequence*."

The historical development: Today's celebration of the Body and Blood of the Lord originated in the Diocese of Liege in 1246 as the feast of *Corpus Christi*. In the reforms of Vatican II, *Corpus Christi* was joined with the feast of the Precious Blood (July 1) to become the *Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord*. We celebrate today Christ's gift to us of the Eucharist, the source and summit of our life together as the Church. The Council of Trent (1545 to 1563), declared that we must honor Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist publicly so that those who observed the faith of Catholics in the Most Holy Eucharist might be attracted to the Eucharistic Lord and believe in the Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, present in this great Sacrament. "*The*

Catholic Church teaches that in the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of the God-man are really, truly, substantially, and abidingly present together with his soul and divinity by reason of the Transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. This takes place in the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass."

The Biblical foundation: Our belief in this Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist derives from the literal interpretation of the promise of Christ to give us his Body and Blood for our spiritual food and drink, as found in St. John's Gospel, Chapter 6, and also in the four independent accounts of the fulfillment of this promise at the Last Supper (Mt. 26; Mk. 14; Lk. 22; 1 Cor. 11). Eucharistic theologians explain the *Real Presence* by a process called *transubstantiation*: the entire *substance* of bread and wine is changed into the entire *substance* of the risen and glorified Body and Blood of Christ, retaining only the "*accidents*" (taste, color, shape) of bread and wine. Can there be a religion in which God is closer to man than our Catholic Christianity? Jesus does not believe that he is humiliating himself in coming to us and giving himself to us in his Flesh and Blood to be our spiritual Food.

Scripture lessons: Today's Scripture readings contain three themes: the Eucharist as blessing or praise of God (action of Melchizedek in Gen 14: 18-20), the Eucharist as memorial of what Jesus did at the Last Supper (1 Cor 11: 21-26) and the Eucharist as food for the multitudes (Lk 9: 11-17). The never-ending supply of bread with which Jesus fed the multitude prefigured his own Body, the consecrated Bread that sustains us until he comes again. The Eucharist is also a re-enactment of Christ's sacrificial Self-giving. The Jews offered animal sacrifices to God, believing that life was in the blood, and the animal blood was a substitute for human lifeblood. Following this Jewish tradition, Jesus offered his own lifeblood as a substitute for the lifeblood of all human beings and, so, sealed the covenant made between God and humankind (1 Cor 11:25), bringing new life to the world. The *Corpus Christi* readings remind us of Jesus' offering of his Body and Blood

which serves in the Church as a lasting memorial of His saving death for us. We renew Jesus' Covenant by participating in the banquet of his Body and Blood, a banquet that, through his death, gives us life.

First reading: Genesis 14: 18-20: Abram was the earlier name of the patriarch Abraham, founder of the Chosen People who became our ancestors in the Faith. This story tells us how Melchizedek, the neighboring Canaanite king and "*priest of God Most High,*" welcomed Abram as he returned after defeating some local "kings" who had kidnapped his brother Lot, and recovering from them the captured property. Both Melchizedek himself and the character of his offering prefigure Jesus. In an act of thanksgiving, this mysterious king-priest blessed Abraham, offered bread and wine to God and shared these with Abraham. Abraham affirms his Faith in the true God whose name he knows and to whom he has sworn an oath (v 22). Jesus became known as "*a priest according to the order of Melchizedek*" (*Psalms 110:4*). Jesus, priest and king, is the Eternal Priest and King of Kings who offered a sacrifice of Bread and Wine during his Last Supper. Jesus is infinitely greater than Melchizedek, in that He is the sacrifice and the offering, the Bread and Wine. Melchizedek offered a gift of gratitude to God. Jesus' gift is also called the Eucharist, meaning thanksgiving. Like Melchizedek's offering of gratitude to God, the Eucharist is our sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for all that He has accomplished in and through Jesus. Although the bread and wine mentioned in Genesis 14 are highly suggestive of the Eucharist for us, the sacrificial meal originally probably had no Eucharistic significance beyond reminding us of the hospitality which should be part of every celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Second Reading, I Cor 11: 21-26: Today, on the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, we listen to Paul's account of the Last Supper. This is one of the few places in his writings where Paul solemnly states that he is handing on a tradition possibly originating in the mid-30s. Paul supports the authenticity of his interpretation of the Last Supper of Jesus, describing it as a direct revelation received from the risen Jesus.

Then he gives the earliest account of what Jesus said and did during the last meal He celebrated with His followers. The words Paul quotes are very similar to those ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This earliest written account of the institution of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament emphasizes Jesus' action of self-giving as expressed in the words over the bread and the cup and his double command to repeat his own action. Paul has to be very clear about his authority here, because he's correcting the Corinthians severely. Misconduct at the Eucharist is one of several abuses for which the Apostle takes them to task. To *proclaim the death of the Lord* is to confess one's Faith in the whole mystery of Christ and all that he means for us. The refusal of some of the Corinthian converts to imitate Jesus' death by dying to their own vested interests had been creating chaos in Church gatherings. Paul believes that since Jesus gave us the Eucharist in the context of his dying for our sake, we should experience it only in the context of our dying to ourselves for his sake. Thus, all Christ's disciples are challenged to promote community, to be united and to hold possessions in common.

Today's Gospel (Lk 9: 11-17): *Theologically*, the miraculous feeding of the crowd of five thousand men could be understood as a type or prefiguring of Jesus' gift of the Eucharistic Bread that would spiritually nourish those who believed in him. *Christologically*, the taking, breaking and giving of the loaves anticipated the "taking" of Jesus in the garden, the "breaking" of his body during his passion and Jesus' "giving" of himself as a sacrifice for the sins of humankind. The description of the miracle also points out the disciples' role in the miraculous feeding of the multitude. Only after they give him what little they have can Jesus bless, break and give it back to them to distribute to the hungry crowd. Luke tells us that Jesus demands all his followers to "share what little they have" when they gather for the Lord's Supper. No matter how insignificant or small our gift, it could be the very thing Jesus blesses to satisfy the hunger of those around us. To die by becoming one with each other and to die by sharing ourselves are at the heart of the Eucharist. If those elements are missing, our rubrics and

actions are meaningless. In Greek the word *koinonia* is used by the Christian writers to describe both the Eucharistic communion and the communion of wealth. For the first Christian communities the two things were the same (cfr. Acts 2:42-45).

Exegesis: Theological significance: Vatican II states that as a sacrifice, "the Holy Eucharist is the center and culmination of Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). Why? 1) Because it enables us to participate in Christ's sacrifice as a present reality and to benefit from its fruits in our own lives. 2) Because it helps us to worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the most perfect way. 3) Because it strengthens our charity and unity with Jesus and each other in a joint offering of his Body and Blood to the Father. 4) Because it gives us a lasting memorial of Christ's suffering, death and Resurrection, reminding us of our obligation to make loving sacrifices for others. The Eucharist is the Mystery of our Faith, the mystery of our Hope, the mystery of our Charity. Why do we celebrate the Eucharist some 2,000 years later? We do this because Jesus told us to do so: "*Do this in memory of me.*" St. Augustine in the 5th century AD said it best when he said: "It is your Mystery, the Mystery of your life that has been placed on the altar." This Holy Memorial is known by various names: 1) "*The Eucharist*" because Jesus offered himself to God the Father as an act of thanksgiving; 2) "*The Lord's Supper*"--or "*Breaking of the Bread*"-- because we celebrate it as a meal; 3) "*Holy Communion*" because, we become one with Christ by receiving him; and 4) "*Holy Mass*" (holy sending), because it gives us a mission: "Go in peace glorifying God by your life."

Jesus replaces the Old Covenant with the New Covenant: Jesus instituted the Eucharist in deliberate allusion to, and fulfillment of, what happened on Mount Sinai. He replaced Moses as the God-chosen mediator, establishing the New Covenant promised through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34), by using his own Blood rather than that of sacrificial animals. By sacramentally consuming the Body and Blood of the God-Man, we, the final-age people of God, are interiorly transformed through the most perfect possible union with God. Jesus

creates a faithful people intimately united with God by means of his sacramental Blood.

The Jewish Passover is transformed into the Eucharistic celebration: Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist while eating the Passover meal, the feast on which the Jews gathered annually to commemorate their ancestors' deliverance from Egyptian slavery. This foundational event began the night God "passed over" the Israelites while punishing their oppressors, who had resisted His will. Israel was "saved through the blood" of sacrificial lambs sprinkled on doorways. (There are some modern Bible scholars who doubt whether Jesus' Last Supper was strictly a Passover meal because many items of the Passover meal are not mentioned). In the second half of today's Gospel, Jesus' words and gestures are understood as mediating the fullness of salvation *through Blood* that would be his own. That night he offered "*the Blood of the (New) Covenant,*" as Blood to be drunk rather than sprinkled. Moreover, since it was his own, this Blood needed no further identification with God by splashing against an altar. Finally, the Blood was "*to be poured out on behalf of the many*" (a Semitism for 'all')." Thus, the new and perfect Paschal Lamb accomplished for people of every nation what Mosaic sacrifices only imperfectly achieved for the Jews. Giving of both "Body" and "Blood" establishes the context of Jesus' sacrificial death, a New Covenant sealed with his Blood.

The Sacrament and the sacrifice: Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist during the Last Supper as a Sacramental banquet and a sacrificial offering. As a Sacrament, the Holy Eucharist is an outward sign in and through which we meet Jesus who shares his life of grace with us. "In the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist the Body and Blood, together with the soul and Divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained" (CCC #1374). In this Sacrament of the Eucharist, we do meet Jesus, the Risen Lord who comes to us under signs of Bread and Wine to nourish and strengthen us for our journey through life. The Eucharistic Meal is a

great mystery because during the Eucharistic celebration the substance of bread and wine are converted into the substance of the risen Jesus' Body and Blood, while their appearances (or 'accidents') remain. We believe in this transformation of bread and wine (called Transubstantiation), because Jesus unequivocally taught it and authorized his apostles to repeat it. As a Sacrament, the Holy Eucharist imparts to us Jesus' abiding presence in our souls. In addition, we share in his Divine life, which is an assurance of eternal life and the basis for the conviction that we are children of God the Father. God shares His life with Jesus and with all other people. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our union with Jesus. In this Sacrament, Jesus gives us his own Body, broken for us on the cross and his precious Blood poured out for us, in order that our sins may be forgiven. The Eucharistic celebration is also asacrifice because it is the re-presentation or re-living in an unbloody manner of Christ's Death on Good Friday and of his Resurrection on Easter Sunday. By means of signs, symbols and prayers, we share in Christ's passion, death and Resurrection made really present for us in an unbloody manner. This re-presenting, this re-living of the One Sacrifice of Christ, which is the heart and point of every Mass, assures us of Jesus' love for us and of his forgiveness of our sins. Through this sacrifice, the risen Jesus becomes present on the altar, offering himself to the Father through the ministry of the priest.

Life Messages: 1) We need to receive this message of unity and sacrificial love: The Eucharist, (the Body and Blood of Christ), teaches us the importance of community, the bond that results from this sacrifice. John Chrysostom says: "What is the Bread actually? The Body of Christ. What do communicants become? The Body of Christ. Just as the bread comes from many grains, which remain themselves and are not distinguished from one another because they are united, so we are united with Christ." Just as numerous grains of wheat are pounded together to make the host, and many grapes are crushed together to make the wine, so we become unified in this sacrifice. Our Lord chose these elements in order to show us that we ought to seek union with one another, to allow the Holy Spirit to transform us into Our Lord Jesus

Christ and to work with Him in the process. Christ is the Head and we are the Body. Together we are one. That which unites us is our willingness to sacrifice our time and talents to God in our fellow members in Christ's Mystical Body. This is symbolized by our sharing in the same Bread and the same Cup. Hence, Holy Communion should strengthen our sense of unity and love.

2) We need to prepare properly to receive Holy Communion: We have tarnished God's image within us through acts of impurity, injustice, disobedience and the like. Hence, there is always need for repentance, and a need for the Sacramental confession of grave sins, before we receive Holy Communion. We should remember the warning given by St. Paul: "*Whoever, therefore, eats the Bread or drinks the Cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the Body and Blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the Bread and drink of the Cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the Body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.*" [1 Cor. 11:27-9]. Hence, let us receive Holy Communion with fervent love and respect -- not merely as a matter of routine. St. Paul is speaking also of the Mystical Body of Christ, i.e., the people of God gathered at the altar. Such a union, plainly, means that our outward piety towards the consecrated Bread and Wine cannot coexist with rudeness, unkindness, slander, cruelty, gossiping or any other breach of charity toward our brothers and sisters.

3) We need to become Christ-bearers and -conveyers: By receiving Holy Communion we become Christ-bearers as Mary was, with the duty of conveying Christ to others at home and in the workplace, as love, mercy, forgiveness and humble and sacrificial service.

As we celebrate this great feast of faith, let us worship what St. Thomas Aquinas did not hesitate to call, "*the greatest miracle that Christ ever worked on earth My BodyMy Blood*". Before the greatness of this mystery, let us exclaim with St. Augustine, "*O Sacrament of*

devotion! O Sign of unity! O Bond of charity!" Let us also repeat St. Thomas Aquinas' prayer of devotion in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament: *"O Sacrament most holy! O Sacrament Divine! All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine!"* **(L/16)**

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