

Cycle B The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Reading 1, Ex 24:3-8

When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances of the LORD, they all answered with one voice, "We will do everything that the LORD has told us." Moses then wrote down all the words of the LORD and, rising early the next day, he erected at the foot of the mountain an altar and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then, having sent certain young men of the Israelites to offer holocausts and sacrifice young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD, Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, "All that the LORD has said, we will heed and do." Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words of his."

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18

R. (13) I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.

How shall I make a return to the LORD for all the good he has done for me? The cup of salvation I will take up, and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

R. I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.

Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones. I am your servant, the son of your handmaid; you have loosed my bonds.

R. I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.

To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the LORD. My vows to the LORD I will pay in the presence of all his people.

R. I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.

Reading II, Heb 9:11-15

Brothers and sisters: When Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God. For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

Gospel, Mk 14:12-16, 22-26

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Today's Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ celebrates the unconditional love Christ has for us. We see two portraits in today's scriptures of the self-sacrificing Savior: First, we see Jesus offering His own unblemished self for our sins, bringing His own body and blood once for all to obtain our eternal redemption. Then, He prepares a generous banquet to feed us the special Bread of companionship and the Holy Blood of the new covenant....a meal that we will dine on for all of eternity. The Body and Blood of Christ, Eucharist, truly is a sacrifice and it is food from Heaven, and it is also the gift of encountering the real presence of Christ in our lives...it is an active experience of the Kingdom of God here and now...and, it is always more.

Eucharist is the "Source and Summit of our Christian Life"...But we must remember that this sacrament is the culmination both of God's actions and our actions...God blessing the world in Christ's actions, and our actions not only of worship, but most importantly, our actions of sharing His love, mercy and forgiveness with the world.

So you see, Eucharist can be called a verb, it is not just a passive noun. It's THE action of Christ truly present in our lives. Actually, there are four actions: Take, Bless, Break, and Give. These sum up and embody Jesus. These are the actions we are commanded to do in Jesus' memory and so our celebration of His Body and Blood embodies these same four actions...nothing is left to chance.

In a few minutes at the Presentation of the Gifts, our gifts of bread and wine are Taken. They represent the gifts of Jesus' life. In the Eucharistic Prayer, the gifts we offer are Blessed – the bread, the wine, being Blessed to become the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Fraction Rite the bread is Broken and the cup poured out. In Communion the Body and Blood are Given that we might become more truly who we receive...Given by Christ to benefit the whole world. So you see, Eucharist is not some-thing, Eucharist is some-one acting in our lives...Christ Himself!

But, you know we are not merely watching the priest do these actions. We are acting as well and then glorifying God with our lives. We are remembering Christ's offering in a very Jewish way: it's as if we are there at the one sacrifice for all, not merely recalling or recreating His sacrifice. We are offering ourselves to be Taken by God, Blessed by God, Broken open and

poured out by God, and then Given by God in love to the whole world. Jesus said, *“Take it; this is my body.”* We do this by joining ourselves to Christ so that we will be transformed into His hands and feet throughout the world. As St. Augustine said, *“Be what you can see, and receive what you are.”* ... *“Be what you can see, and receive what you are.”*

Truly this is amazing. God loves us so much that He invites us to join our lives to His. We don't come to celebrate Eucharist to merely get something. We come so we can BECOME someone who we are most deeply called to be. We celebrate His Body and Blood to put on the mind and heart of Christ. You know, if we ever say about Mass, “I don't get anything out of it,” we are missing the point entirely...people, we are here not only to receive something...we are here to give ourselves to be changed by Jesus Christ Himself.

Eucharist is infinitely more than a moment when a bell rings during the Eucharistic Prayer. It is infinitely more than a private “me and God-in-the-host” moment. It is infinitely more than adoration and devotion as those are traditionally understood.

When Eucharist is understood as these four actions, I think it becomes obvious what it means to be the Body of Christ, the Church. The gifts are presented by and then to those who are fully initiated in this Communion with God. And, we present our lives to be offered with Christ, and then we receive back our transformed selves...We proclaim our AMEN realizing who we are becoming and the responsibility that this entails! This is what full, conscious, and active participation in our Eucharistic celebration means.

Eucharist is a choice to do something...to take action...to fully, consciously and actively participate in connecting ourselves with Christ...to be Taken, Blessed, Broken open and Given out in love every, single, day...to everyone. To celebrate Eucharist is an amazing and radical life changing activity because the truth is, God will change us in ways beyond our imaginations!

As St. Augustine said, *“the Amen’ we say at Mass must ring true in our lives.”* Imagine how our Church and our world might be changed if we all participated this way!

A few years ago, Pat and I spent the weekend at my sister's house on Lake Hartwell. We ended up attending their non-denominational church service. As we were leaving, I mentioned how I thought it was a very "Catholic" sermon Pastor Mark gave. Especially the part where we are commanded to care for the widows, the single moms, and care for the orphans, and care for the sojourners, the immigrants, and care for the poor. "Now I know what you are thinking," he said. "Pastor Mark this sounds like a very liberal agenda. But I have to stop you right there. God's commandments are neither liberal or conservative. Let me tell you if we are thinking that way, we are bringing God's way of thinking down to our human way...a misguided way. Pure and simple, God's way is love, not a political agenda." Well, that was a very Catholic Social Teachings sermon if I ever heard one. But, what really surprised me was how we had several brief discussions about Pastor Mark's sermon during the rest of the day... You know, I can't help but think how we glorified God that weekend by sharing Christ's love, mercy and forgiveness in moments when we were vulnerable telling our stories and even sharing how we have been deeply offended by loved ones...(I mean, how Eucharist can you get!)

How Blessed we are to be called to this table. How Blessed we are to be able to celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ so frequently, and to taste the Kingdom of God. How Blessed we are to be the Body of Christ sharing His love, mercy and forgiveness with the whole world!

AMEN!

Alleluia!