

HOMILY FOR THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST 2020

Deuteronomy 8:2-3,14-16 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17 John 6: 51-58

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi, or the Body and Blood of Christ, is over 700 year old. It is very old and very Catholic. In Europe, it is marked by elaborate processions around the church. Because Holy Thursday, when the Lord gave us the Eucharist, occurs in Holy Week which centres on the Lord's Passion and Death, the Church set aside this special feast in June to reflect on the Eucharist itself, the gift of Jesus to his Church.

Our readings today point to three aspects of this core mystery of our faith: the Real Presence, the Eucharist as the source of our unity and the Eucharist as nourishment for the soul.

The Real Presence is the teaching of the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel. "The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks My blood has life eternal", says the Lord. One of the first things we learn as Catholics and one of the most comforting, strengthening truths that pervades our whole life from childhood into our senior years is the truth of the Real Presence.

When we come to church, we don't have to hope that the Lord will be here. His presence doesn't depend on our mood, our feelings, our holiness or even our faith. Christ is truly present in the Eucharist by his promise and power. That is what is meant by the "Real Presence." When we come to church, the Lord is present in the tabernacle and at Mass not symbolically but actually. The distinctive strength, the muscle, the centre and the heart of Catholic spirituality is the truth of the Real Presence.

The Lord also gave us the Eucharist to draw us together. That is the teaching of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. When we receive Holy Communion, we all receive the same Jesus. It is a striking scene on Sunday to see people coming forward at Communion time, a cross-section of humanity, men, women, children, healthy and ill, all coming to receive the same Lord. If we could look into their hearts, we would see that some are very near to God, almost saints. Others are still on the way, while others carry burdens, unknown to us. The same Jesus gives himself to all. In his earthly life, Jesus spoke to many people. He didn't just gather a little nucleus of really faithful souls. He gave himself to all who followed. Eucharist is not reserved for the perfect but is given to help us all along the journey of life. It is "esca viatorum," food for the journey. In the Eucharist, Jesus does not simply come among us like a dignitary passing through a crowd. He is coming to each of us as food and drink. And although the gift is always the same (the whole of himself), its effect in us, the influence it will have, is something very personal, in proportion to the needs of each like sunlight through multicoloured glass. He knows our needs, our capacities. Because we receive the same Christ, the Eucharist makes us more strongly a part of the Body of Christ. It is the spiritual adhesive that holds us together.

Lastly, the Eucharist nourishes us like the manna in the desert, mentioned in today's First Reading. The Old Testament manna nourished the people's bodies. We need ordinary bread. That is our first and most basic necessity. However, ordinary bread nourishes only half of us – the physical side. But we also have a spiritual side. It too cries out for nourishment.

For this spiritual side we need another kind of bread, bread that only God can give, the Corpus Christi of Christ. We get this bread abundantly in the Eucharist. The Eucharist nourishes the soul. In Holy Communion we receive Jesus, the bread of eternal life. The Mass, the gathering of the Church, reminds us of our identity as Christians and that we share in the mission of the Church, that we are not just living a life but are on a journey to the promised land of heaven. Through difficulty, pain, problems, the Eucharist is our manna, our food for the journey which gives us grace and promises us future glory. The Mass, the Eucharist, is the great school of Jesus where we learn about Christian life, about Christ's love, about our own dignity as Christians, about our mission in life and about our unity.

The feast of Corpus Christi each year is like a homecoming. It's a moment to reaffirm our Catholic faith in the Eucharist. The celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of the life of the Church. The Church is where the Eucharist is, and the Eucharist forms the Church. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, our church services have been suspended, so that we cannot celebrate the Eucharist in our churches. I think that we are now experiencing the hunger for receiving Holy Communion. Unfortunately, with the rules of distancing restrictions, up to now we still cannot open our churches to celebrate the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ publicly like other years. I know that you are not happy and are disappointed to stay at home and watch Mass online and then receive spiritual Holy Communion only.

The Eucharist embodies everything that Jesus did for us and everything that Jesus is for us. It is the mystery of faith that gathers together Jesus's teaching, his passion, his resurrection and his pledge of eternal life to us. If we stay close to the Mass, we will never drift far from the Lord. That is exactly what Jesus intended. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." 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.

This weekend, we give thanks for this gift of Christ's body and blood. More importantly, we strive to imitate the self-giving nature of our God himself. As we celebrate and spiritually consume the Eucharist at home this year, let us commit ourselves to the journey of transformation. May we grow daily into the Eucharistic Christ who reaches out to all people and who gives himself fully for the life of the world. Amen.

Happy Feast Day, the Corpus Christi!

I would like to wish you and your family have great week.

God bless you and be with you always!

Fr Tao Pham