

3<sup>rd</sup> June 2018 (Body and Blood of Christ, Year B)

Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 115(116):12-13,15-18; Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16,22-26.

**This is my body; ... this is my blood!**

Today we are invited to reflect on another great mystery that Christians live and celebrate very regularly; the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The gospel reading today is taken from the Last Supper scene in the gospel according to Mark. Jesus, sitting with his disciples for the Jewish Passover meal, declares the bread and wine to be his true body and blood for us to eat and drink. The first and the second readings, on the other hand, take us back to the Jerusalem temple where sacrifices of reconciliation were regularly offered.

As we observe in the first reading, the blood of the sacrificial offering had a very special role; half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar and the other half was used to sprinkle those taking part in the sacrifice. The altar represented God and whatever was placed on the altar belonged to God. Hence, in a sacramental way, Moses and the high priest sprinkled both God and the people. Blood represented life, and the blood of the sacrificial offering represented the life of God. When the people offering the sacrifice were sprinkled with blood, they sacramentally shared in the life of God.

The letter to the Hebrews in the second reading tells us that while in the Old Testament the sacrifice had to be repeated over and over again, because it was an imperfect and incomplete offering, Christ's sacrifice of the cross is perfect and complete and cannot be repeated. Christ is the Lamb of God sacrificed once and for all for our salvation. The Lamb of God was not sacrificed on the altar in the temple, but on the altar of the cross.

In preparation for this great moment of his ministry, on Holy Thursday Jesus took the wine and changed it into his own blood. Then, instead of sprinkling his disciples with the blood, he gave it to them to share so that they can have his very life in them. The blood of Jesus is shed twice: at the table of the Last Supper and on the cross. The Eucharist is the sacrament of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Church invites us to take part in this sacrifice and meal each time she celebrates the Eucharist. When we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus at Communion, we are taking part in the great sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross.

While we need to constantly remind ourselves that there is absolutely no difference between the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ and that Christ is wholly and fully present in each, the Church invites us and encourages us, whenever possible, to receive Eucharist both as Body and Blood. The symbolism of the sacrifice of the cross comes across more clearly when we participate in the cup by drinking from the Blood of Christ.

Fr Mario