

Homily
June 11, 2023
The Most Holy Body & Blood of Christ
33:17 – 42:30

Brothers and sisters, we are the body of Christ. So Saint Paul tells us again and again in his writings. Saint Augustine took that same idea and said it a little differently: “We become what we eat.” When we eat the Body of the Lord, we become essentially a bearer of the Body of the Lord because we are the body of Christ. And because of that, wherever we are, whatever we do, we are Christ in the world.

This day, the Feast of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, comes to us each year. And it brings to us a chance to reflect upon this great truth of God in our midst always, especially in the Eucharist. But the Eucharist itself is “*polyvalent*.” That is, that it has many levels of meaning and many messages for us. I’m going to share those with you because they are essential to who we are and what we believe in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is sacrifice. It is the celebration of salvation recalled in Christ’s self-giving. It is tied to the atonement sacrifices of Judaism and the lamb of sacrifice of the Passover meal. We know it to be a sacrifice. The Lord’s own words, which we will hear in the Eucharistic prayer are these: of the bread, “It will be given up for you.” Of the blood, “It will be shed for you all so that sins may be forgiven.” Brothers and sisters, this is the New Covenant in the Blood of Christ. And we are the body, fed by that very gift of Body and Blood.

The Eucharist is a meal. It’s a sharing in the sacrifice. Our ancestors shared in the sacrifice of the Passover as a symbol of their redemption. For us, it is a remembrance of our salvation in Christ. We are feeding upon the mystery of God’s love whenever we receive and celebrate. But as our reading so clearly stated - the Second Reading – the meal makes us one through participation in the very reality of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Eucharist is a memorial. Jesus says, “Do this in memory of me.” This is a command, my brothers and sisters. It’s a *mandatum*, very similar to the one in John’s Gospel account at the Last Supper in the washing of the feet. It’s an echo of our First Reading today. “Do not forget the Lord, your God and all that he has done for you in the 40 years in the desert.”

But in our case, in Eucharist we are participating in the original celebration of the Last Supper. What we do here is encased within the trans-historical reality of the salvation Jesus brought us and we

celebrate it in the Eucharist. It stretches all the way to Adam and all the way to the end of time. And we are in its midst.

It's good for us to remember, it's one sacrifice. We participate in the original, as it says so clearly in the Letter to the Hebrews.

It is also a participation in the *hesed*, the unwavering love of God. And we do it as a group. As a body. A coming together of believers, to proclaim the goodness of our God.

Together we enact the memorial. We enact the meal. We enact the sacrifice. Tied to the one.

Our Gospel today makes very clear our belief. Chapter 6. John's great account in the words of Jesus, "For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

In the 12th century, the question was asked, "How? How can this be? How does this happen? How does bread and wine become Body and Blood?" It was not the first time the question was asked, but it was the first time it gained widespread discussion and debate. In the Early Church, all Early Church writers and preachers agreed that the reality of the Body & Blood of Christ was a matter of faith, based on the words of Jesus, "**This is...**"

The "how" debated in theological discussions was faith seeking understanding or reason. The accepted answer, *transubstantiation*, was based in a theological language rooted in Aristotelian philosophical language. In other words, it was technical language. And just like I have no idea how computers work and I can sit and listen to geeks talk all about it – that's a special language, is it not? Doctors have it. Engineers have it. Theologians have it. And for the most part, we try to understand what they're saying. Right? Architects have their own language, too, I've come to find out.

We listen. We try. But ultimately my brothers and sisters, no matter whether we have only heard the words, or studied theology, or have some sort of advanced degree in it, it's about faith. We try to understand. But the most important thing is, believe.

My brothers and sisters, for us the Eucharist is the Source and Summit of our whole spiritual life in Christ. That's what the 2nd Vatican Council wrote in its *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. The Source and Summit, that to which we move and long. This Eucharist consumes us in Christ, even as we are consuming it. That we are as Christ's followers is rooted in this reality.