

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ - *Whoever eats this bread will live forever*
June 14, 2020.

This Sunday, we celebrate the gift of the Eucharist, the Body, and Blood of Jesus Christ Our Lord. We partake of him every time we receive Holy Communion, and in the Eucharist, Our Lord sacramentally remains with us always for our consolation and adoration. Yes, during the pandemic, we most likely cannot receive the Eucharist sacramentally, but we can still receive it spiritually. **Eucharist**, also called **Holy Communion** or **Lord's Supper**, in Christianity, is ritual commemoration of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, at which he gave them bread saying, "**This is my body**," and wine saying, "**This is my blood.**" The story of the **Institution of the Eucharist** by Jesus on the night before his Crucifixion is reported in the three synoptic gospels and mentioned in the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:17–20; and 1 Corinthians 11:23–25).

In this Sunday's First Reading (Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16) Moses reminds the people of Israel, just before their entry into the Promised Land after forty years, that the Lord fed them in their need, just as he feeds us now through the Eucharist. The manna that the Lord sent to the Israelites during their wandering in the desert is a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. Manna was unknown to the ancestors of the Israelites. The Eucharist is a food unheard of in human history before the coming of Christ, and nothing will ever match it because it is God himself.

In the Second Reading (1 Corinthians 10:16-17), St. Paul reminds us that Holy Communion enables us to participate in Our Lord's sacrifice of his Body and Blood and in so doing draws us into communion with God and with each other. In ancient religions, sacrifices were made and then partaken of to express a communion to which the sacrifice was being made. In Christian worship, **God sacrifices himself to achieve communion, and we participate in that sacrifice in order to be in that communion.** Our Lord reconciled us with the Father through the sacrifice of his Body and Blood, and taught us to eat and drink that Body and Blood in order to have communion with him. **Breaking bread with someone is a gesture of peace and fraternity.** Our Lord not only restores our communion with the Father, but also with each other in every celebration of the Eucharist when bread is broken for us. Throughout the world, wherever it is celebrated, believers are spiritually one body because through partaking in the Holy Eucharist we become united with God and with each other.

In the Gospel reading (John 6:51-59), Jesus describes the bread that he will give as something even greater than the manna the Israelites received because the Eucharist gives eternal life. Despite Israel's infidelity and mistrust, the Lord fed them something they'd never seen before. When the first flakes of manna appeared, they had to ask what they were. If manna caused confusion in the desert, we can only imagine how mind-blowing it was to Our Lord's listeners when he taught them that he himself was **food sent from Heaven, the food they'd have to eat to live forever.** Christ taught this before he even raised bread and said, "**this is my body**": It requires faith in Christ then and now to accept this teaching. It was only at the Last Supper that his disciples really understood that bread and wine would become Christ's Body and Blood. That Last Supper became the **Institution of the Eucharist**, making himself the true food and drink for us.

The letters of the Apostle Paul and the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament also mention that early Christians believed that this Institution of the Eucharist included a mandate to continue the celebrations among believers as an anticipation to the joys of the banquet that was to come in the Kingdom of God. This Sunday, our celebration, like the early Christians, focuses on the Gift of the Last Supper, the Gift of the Eucharist. The feast is meant to help us grow in the understanding of the Eucharist and in our reverence for this great sacrament. The gift of the

Eucharist is truly amazing. But in life's hustle and bustle we can sometimes start taking it for granted. Maybe we should reflect a minute and renew our sense of awe and gratitude in the face of this great gift.

Yes, there are many ways that the Lord is present. He is present in the beauties of nature, and in the smile of a baby. He is present where two or three are gathered together in His Name, and He is present in the Word of Scripture. But the greatest presence of the Lord possible for us on earth is the Real Presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. At mass, ***Bread and Wine become the Body and Blood of the Lord.*** They do not symbolically become the Lord. They become the Lord. They do not just signify the Lord. They are the Lord. Communion is not just the union of the community. It is the union of the community with Jesus Christ, present in each person who receives communion and present in all of us together. I remember that during my permanent diaconate formation, one of our instructors on Liturgy recommended that to show strong unity and communion during the Eucharist, have everyone who receives remain standing and singing until the last person in the community receives, and then the entire community kneel together and pray silently with the One who unites them. When we receive communion we are united with Christ and through Christ with one another throughout the world.

When I was young, my parents told me to genuflect towards the tabernacle (the "red light" zone) where the Eucharist is kept on entering and leaving the church. As time goes by, it becomes just a "gesture" and needs to be polished up: genuflecting with a bit more purpose and care, showing true reverence and gratitude for our Savior. We decorate our churches with beautiful flowers and valuable art, because here in the church building, in the tabernacle, our Lord is present, accompanying us and interceding for us in the Eucharist. When we receive the Holy Communion, we become the living temples of the Lord. Out of respect for Christ's presence and out of courtesy towards those who wish to pray, let's speak only when we need to and in quiet tone of voice whenever we are inside a Church with the Eucharist. We celebrate our Masses with music, vestments, incense, candles, and many other beautiful, tangible expressions of our faith in Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Let's renew our attention to these details, so that we can live each Mass full of gratitude and wonder, thinking more about his love and grace than about ourselves. **The Eucharist is Christ among us, Christ giving himself to us completely, just because he loves us.** Let's open our hearts to that love, like flowers opening themselves to the sun - which is when their real beauty shines through.

By receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, we allow him to live in us. It is his flesh and blood that mix with our flesh and blood. On this day, let us remember to thank the Lord for dwelling in our hearts. ***"Whoever eats this bread will live forever"*** (John 6:51). Your concern for us, Lord Jesus, makes you leave us a food that lasts forever. Today we ask you that this food may create in us an availability to take you to others, so that the tenderness you have for us can also be shown to others. ***When you eat this bread, remember me; When you drink this cup, remember me Until I come again.***