

## **The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord - Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb**

June 19, 2022.

Happy Father's Day to all fathers, grandfathers, God fathers, fathers to be and pastoral fathers. As Pope Francis writes in his APOSTOLIC LETTER PATRIS CORDE on the 150th Anniversary of the proclamation of SAINT JOSEPH as patron of the Universal Church on December 8, 2020 **"Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person"**

This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord, or **Corpus Christi**. This solemnity differs from Holy Thursday when we celebrate the initiation of the sacrament of the Eucharist at the Last Supper and emphasize the union of our reception of the sacrament with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross on Good Friday. Today's liturgy, like that of last Sunday, invites us to a deeper appreciation of the Paschal Mystery we have just celebrated. Today we renew our faith in the great sacrament in which the Saviour's Paschal Mystery gives life to the Church age after age.

The gospel reading from Luke (9:11-17) makes clear the central place given to the Eucharist in the community for which the gospel was written. In Luke's narrative, Jesus, after completing his Galilean ministry, turns his attention to the formation of the apostles. He has them share in his mission by sending them to preach the good news and to heal the sick. Confronted by a crowd that has neglected to provide themselves with nourishment in their eagerness to stay in his company, **Jesus has a new lesson for The Twelve. 'Give them something to eat yourselves', he tells them.** There can be no doubt, as the narrative continues, that Luke sees these words as pointing to the Eucharist, the nourishing of the people of God that will be the centerpiece of the apostolic ministry. Taking the loaves and fish, Jesus 'raises his eyes to heaven', pronounces 'the blessing' over the loaves, and then 'breaks them'. Though provided by Jesus, the nourishment is given to the people through the ministry of the apostles – who are instructed to organize the people 'in parties', to distribute the loaves and fish, and to collect the scraps.

The context of Paul's words (1Corinthians 11:23-26) has great practical significance. Immediately prior to this passage, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for forming selfish and exclusive factions as they gather to celebrate the sacrament that should awaken in them a love that is selfless, one with that of the Saviour! St Paul's letter to the Corinthians gives us the oldest extant account of the institution of the Eucharist. Paul writes barely twenty years after the crucifixion; but he makes it clear that he is handing on an authentic and sacred tradition of the Christian community. This is independently confirmed by the fact that Paul's narrative of what happened at the Last Supper shows clear evidence of having been modified by repetition in liturgical celebrations. The implications of Paul's brief account are momentous. **'This is my body, which is for you'**. In the Church's central act of worship, Jesus makes himself the nourishment of the world, perpetuating the last act of his earthly life in which he gave himself into the hands of his Father, for the life of the world. The words, **'This is the new covenant in my blood'**, echo the declaration of Moses as he inaugurated the first covenant (Exodus 24:8); but this is the 'new' covenant in which humanity's final bonding with God replaces the shadows and types of the Old Testament. The celebration is a 'memorial' that 'proclaims the Lord's death until he comes – 'the constant faith of the Church since the beginning, that the Lord and his Paschal Mystery are present in the celebration of the Eucharist, finds strong support in the biblical overtones of these words.

The Eucharist is the meal of the Catholic community, "our daily bread", but it is far more than just a meal of fellowship. Each person who receives communion receives the Body of Christ within him or her as individuals. In this way each person is united together to the total Mystical Body of Christ. Our union is far more than fellowship. Perhaps the best example is the one St. John gives: the example of the vine and the branches. The branches of a vine or a tree do not just live in fellowship with each other, they live united to each other through their union to the life giving trunk. We are the branches united to the vine and sustained by the life force of the Eucharist. For us Catholics, Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist uniting us to his Passion, Death and Resurrection, nourishing us. Unlike many other Christian Churches we do not believe that the Eucharist just points to the Lord or signifies our union with Christ. We Catholics believe that **THE EUCHARIST IS THE LORD**. We believe that when we receive Communion, we receive Jesus within us, sanctifying us. We speak to the Lord within us. When the bread and wine are consecrated during the Mass, **the very substance or essence of the bread and wine is changed from the physical to the spiritual. That is why we Catholics say that the hosts and the wine are consecrated, not just blessed.** That is also why the hosts which are consecrated during the Mass are reserved in our tabernacles after Mass. We can then take the Real Presence of the Lord to the sick and dying. We also can worship before the Eucharistic presence of the Lord here in Church, the adoration.

Sometimes people ask me about non-Catholics receiving the Eucharist or Catholics receiving communion in non Catholic churches. **In the Catholic Church the Eucharist is offered only to practicing Catholics capable of receiving communion. For a Catholic, the reception of the Eucharist is an affirmation of the entire faith of the Church.** People may share a belief in Christ, and even celebrate a communion service, but not necessarily share a belief in the Eucharist as being the real presence of Christ. A person needs to profess the faith of the community before the person can join the community meal. Our theology does not isolate the Eucharist from the rest of our beliefs. Other faiths may not view the Eucharist as being a total statement of their faith. Also, only Catholics in the state of grace are invited to receive communion. This refers to a person who has not destroyed the life of God received at baptism by committing a grave or mortal sin. If a person has refused to worship, engaged in serious immoral practices, etc, making the conscious choice to put this before God, that person needs to reestablish the life of God through the sacrament of reconciliation before receiving communion. By the way, a sin is only mortal when it is known to be mortal and has been freely chosen. **Only Catholics who know that they have lost their relationship to God are excluded from the Eucharist.**

Brothers and sisters, the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord is a good time for a bit of a refresher regarding proper reverence in the church and when receiving communion. Because we believe that Jesus is present in the Blessed Sacrament within our tabernacles, we need to show reverence in Church. When we enter a pew, we need to genuflect. If we have bad knees and cannot genuflect, we should bow. Once in our place, we should say a prayer of greeting to the Lord. At communion time we make a gesture of reverence before receiving. This should be a small bow. Some people genuflect, some go down on their knees. Neither is necessary but If a person's conscience is saying that this is what he or she needs to do, then so be it, as long as the action is one of reverence, not a declaration of piety for others to notice. The most important practice is it's so wrong and so disrespectful to the Presence of the Lord for us to receive communion and then ignore the One within us and walk straight to the Church exit door. We need to speak to the Lord within us. We need to pray directly to Jesus inside of us in the Eucharist, even for just a few short minutes.

**May every Eucharistic celebration be an invitation to give ourselves completely to Jesus, and to surrender ourselves to his power of love, which will change us and bring us**

**to eternal life. May we always be a people of thanksgiving, a community which knows how to praise God for the basic gifts of life and for what God has done for us. Amen.**