

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ -- June 13-14, 2020

Last Sunday we reflected on the great mystery of the nature of God as a Holy Trinity of Persons. In the end we said that the Holy Trinity is not so much a mystery to try and understand but rather a call for us who are made in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity to live in a manner of life that reflects the unity, love and self-giving of the Holy Trinity.

Today the Church gives us the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ to help us reflect on how through the sacraments we are helped to participate in the divine life and actions of God.

This sounds like another great mystery to try and understand, but actually is about God reaching out to take care of our most basic needs for our journey of life just as he did for the Israelites during their 40 years of journey through the desert.

God provided food and drink for the Israelites on their journey. Their memory of this was a kind of nourishment and encouragement for future times of need. As God had provided for them in times past so they are confident that God will continue to do in the future. Telling these stories helps us to see the grace that God is providing for us in the present time.

Now, part of staying healthy is eating the right foods. Think of the nourishing meals you have eaten. Think also of the meals that filled you but had little nutritional value. What is there about junk food that entices us? We need to be careful about the way we nourish our bodies and our minds. Think about how what we read or listen to in the media or elsewhere effects how we behave and react to different persons and situations. There is a lot of junk on Facebook.

However, that is only part of the picture. Nourishment for life also comes through relationships. That is an issue that we are dealing right now with persons in our nursing homes who are quarantined in them and are starving for the “touch” and affection of their families and loved ones.

Think about the relationships that have nourished you and enabled you to be the person that you are today. Who has had the most influence on us in our life? Is there someone who has been special to us but does not know it? What kind of nourishment have we received from our relationship with Christ?

Along with need for bodily and relational nourishment we also need nourishment in many other ways, intellectually, socially and also spiritually.

What has nourished us along our spiritual journey? How has the Word of God nourished us? I was listening to a CD by Fr. Larry Richards on the meaning of the Mass. On this CD he talks about people who tell him that they never hear God speaking to them. However, he said, sometimes after reading Gospel and before beginning his homily he will ask the people what the Gospel was about and everyone's head will do down. They were not listening to God speaking to them in the Scriptures.

What role has the Eucharist or the Mass and other sacraments played in sustaining us in our life? -- There are times when we hunger for the things of God and seek God's presence and praying comes easily. At other times one can feel no hunger at all for God or the things of God and it is much harder to pray and to recognize God in the Eucharist and in other people. A prayer in the Office of Readings asks for strength in adversity and protection in prosperity. It takes faith to believe that the Eucharist feeds us both in times of spiritual struggle and in times of contentment.

Today in the Gospel, Jesus says that his flesh and his blood that we receive in the Eucharist are true food and true drink. Just as the manna in the desert was a unique and unfamiliar food for the Israelites, so we see Jesus taking it one step further by providing food and drink to us by transforming it into his own Body and Blood.

The Eucharist is Christ's most amazing gift of Himself to us. We need to pray that we appreciate the uniqueness of this true food and that we participate

worthily in partaking of this gift. It is not a symbol of Christ; it is his true presence coming into us.

Fr. Larry Richards, on the CD that I mentioned earlier said that often people complain that they are not getting fed when they come to Mass. How can they say that, he says, when Christ gives us his whole self and there is nothing more that he can give us. Are they telling Christ that this is not enough?

Christ gives us the Eucharist as a promise of eternal life, but it is much more. It nourishes us so that we may live as followers of Jesus and imitate the life that he lived. By our reception of the Eucharist, we too, are called to become bread for the world and nourishment for those in need. Participation in **receiving** the Eucharist is not a passive action. If we participate in the Body and Blood, we take an active part in the life of Christ. We do as Jesus does. It implies being ready at times to participate in his cross.

Jesus' gift and presence of Himself in the Eucharist is more than something to be reverence and adored—it is a eucharistic process – a self-giving of Christ himself. He wants us to “remain” in him. This is not a static “remaining” but a call for the continuation of his self-giving through we ourselves becoming bread broken to feed others and pouring out ourselves for others.

The purpose of the Eucharist is not limited to bringing us into communion with him and each other. Rather, this living bread sent down from heaven is meant for “the life of the world” as Jesus says in the Gospel. As those who are nourished at the table of the Lord, we must not hide this treasure but instead being the eucharistic people Christ has called us to take this gift of himself out to the world.

The other Gospel accounts of the Last Supper present us with a more reverent and calm sharing of bread and wine by Jesus and the apostles around a table. By contrast, John's Gospel and its very direct speaking of eating flesh and blood strikes us as it did the crowds in the original telling as rather harsh. This

seems to be John's point – that Jesus doesn't provide us with a convenient ritual to use in religious ceremonies. Jesus comes to feed the world's deep and gnawing hunger for love, justice, healing, hope and help. Partaking of this sacrament means taking up his work to feed these deep hungers.

That is the point also of the tradition of Eucharistic processions out into the streets on this feast day in many places. They are meant to remind us that Christ wants not only to nourish us so that we can continue our journey in life with the strength God gives us through the risen Christ, the Bread of Life, but also wants us to out in his name and be bread broken and wine poured out for the needs of humanity. Who is hungry for God in our community and how are meeting this and the other hungers in our world and community today?

Today we thank God for the daily nourishment of our bodies, minds and spirits and especially for the Eucharist in divine and eternal life is shared with us and makes us into one body in Christ, and we pray for the grace to share this nourishment with others as Jesus did and we are called and commanded to do as we go forth from each Mass.