

“Partaking and Taking Part: Remembering the Mystery Christ’s Presence in His Body” Homily for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, Year “A”

Introduction

It is certainly very appropriate that we celebrate this Solemnity of the Corpus Christi on this day when we can resume, albeit with certain limitations, public Masses throughout the Archdiocese. I say this because this is the Sunday the Church designates to give particular honor to the gift of the Most Holy Eucharist, and “eucharist” means, literally, “thanksgiving.” This is indeed a day of great thanksgiving for us: we give thanks to God that this long period of fasting from the Eucharist is now ended.

Remember

Yes, this long period of our people’s absence from the Eucharist is now ended (or at least, beginning to end). But physical absence is only one kind; there is also mental absence. We must be alert to not allow ourselves to be mentally absent even when we are physically present. This is exactly what we hear Moses warning the ancient people of Israel about in our first reading.

The Book of Deuteronomy records for us Moses’ final discourse to the people of Israel before they enter into and take possession of the Promised Land. They have now finished their forty years of wandering in the Sinai Desert after their miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt, and are now about to enter into the inheritance their Lord had promised them. What does Moses tell them? This long discourse can be summed up in one word: “remember.” “Remember how for forty years now the LORD, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert Do not forget the LORD, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery; who guided you through the vast and terrible desert” Mental absence is forgetfulness, and it is precisely this that Moses admonishes God’s people to avoid.

These are certainly words that we need to take to heart today. Pandemic, economic collapse, riots, ongoing revelations of racism and the social and economic inequalities it causes, all of this has put us into a sort of a spiritual desert marked by uncertainty, insecurity, and even fear. So, we must remember. We must remember not only all that the Lord has done for us in the past, but also the heavenly destiny he has prepared for us in our future of eternity.

Our Pilgrimage with the Lord

Just like the ancient people of Israel, God is leading us to a better place. And like them, He puts us, too, to the test. He directs our journeying in this life in order “to test [us] by affliction and find out whether or not it [is our] intention to keep his commandments. ... in order to show [us] that not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD.”

And just as He sustained them with food for the journey in the form of manna from heaven, so He sustains us with the bread of life come down from heaven. This is our “viaticum”, the food for our journey in this life to sustain us in our pilgrimage toward heaven. This is what our Lord tells us: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever”, and, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.”

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Do you know what this means? The ancient people of Israel were a pilgrim people, on pilgrimage to a geographical land their Lord had promised them; we are a pilgrim people, on pilgrimage to the true Promised Land of heaven. But this is only possible because our Lord himself made himself a pilgrim: he made his pilgrimage to this earth when he left his heavenly throne to be among us. He wanted to be a pilgrim with us, so that we could be pilgrims with him in his return to the Promised Land of heaven after his saving death, Resurrection and Ascension into glory. But how, really, do we get there? Is it just a matter of eating this bread of life, or is there more to it than that?

Members of the Body

St. Paul tells us in our second reading (from First Corinthians): "The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body." *Participation*: that is the key. The Body of Christ is the Eucharist, the bread from heaven that we eat; but the Body of Christ is also the Church, in which we are called to participate. So, to *partake of* the Body of Christ means to *take part in* the Body of Christ. We make pilgrimage to heaven with him together, as members of his Body the Church, united to him and under him our head, as he sustains us with his Body and Blood, the food for our journey with him.

This is the people of God that God calls us to be. In accordance with the traditional practice on this Solemnity of Corpus Christi, we will express this divine calling of ours ritualistically by way of procession with the Blessed Sacrament at the end of Mass, stopping along the way to pray at four altars positioned to face the four directions: this divine calling is not restricted to one group or tribe or race or nation, but is extended to all peoples across the face of the earth.

Conclusion

As we emerge from shelter in place, let us remember to remember: remember all that our Lord has done for us and for the whole world, remember all that he has prepared for us, and remember always to give him thanks, for, as we pray at every Mass, "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks."