

14 June 2020

Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

1 Corinthians 10:16-17; John 6:51-58

A little context will help us make better sense of today's Gospel reading. The Jewish leaders confront Jesus, saying, "Hey, you are making some pretty big claims for yourself. We don't know if you're the real thing or not. We know that Moses was the real thing, and that when our people were wandering in the desert and were hungry, he gave them manna for them to eat bread from heaven. That's what Moses did, so what can YOU do?"

Jesus says, "Well, first, it wasn't Moses who gave the manna but God in heaven gave it. And this God who sent manna to the people in the wilderness, this God is my Father, and instead of manna he has now sent....me. I am the bread the heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and then were hungry again. Whoever feeds on me will never hunger. The bread I give is my life for the life of the world." He himself is the miracle.

That's very deep, mystical material to digest. When we say "Give us this day our daily bread," we are saying, "Give us, YOU, Jesus." In our weakness, be our strength, O Jesus. In our sins, show us mercy, O Jesus. In our pain and emptiness, walk with us, O Jesus. In our joy, pop the cork and celebrate with us, O Jesus. Give us yourself as our daily bread.

That's pretty deep, but you know **I think St. Paul's words in the second reading go even deeper. Is not the cup we share a participation in the blood of Christ?** Is not the bread we break a participation in the Body of Christ? **What is it to "participate in the Blood of Christ"?**

In a recent pastoral letter to us, Bishop Callahan said that in these days of caution against the coronavirus, priests should assure even those present in church for mass that they need not come to communion in order to be in Communion with Jesus. He specifically said that being united with the assembly, God's People, unites us to Jesus, and that we are united to Jesus when we join him in his offering to the Father in the Eucharistic Prayer. It's a huge point that must be appreciated. When I articulate our prayer, "Through him, with him and in him, O God Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours forever and ever," **we are saying that we participate in the Body and Blood of Christ when we, like Jesus, offer our lives to God.**

Greek author **Nikos Kazantzakis** said there are **three types of disciples** of Jesus. One says, "I'm a bow in your hands, Lord, bend me, use me for your glory." A second says that but adds, "But don't bend me too far, for I might break." Instead of that, the third says, "Bend me as far as you want, Lord, and who cares if I break!" Can you feel the freedom in that? I'm definitely more of a level 2 disciple, to be honest, but I strive for the freedom of level 3. To participate in the Blood of Christ is to offer ourselves in service to God as Jesus offered himself to his Father on the Cross, freely and wholly and not counting the cost.

In 2 Corinthian chapter 4, St. Paul says, "We are always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body." That's beautiful but abstract. This story from the life of St. Francis makes it more concrete. Francis and Brother Leo were looking for shelter on a cold and rainy night. They knocked on monastery door and the porter monk, opened it, insulted them as beggars and sent them reeling with a slam of the door. Brother Leo was really angry and upset, spewing

all sort of insults against the porter. Then he saw Francis on the ground laughing and smiling. “What are you laughing about? Why are you so happy? Aren’t you upset by what that jerk the porter did to us?” Francis replied, “We should thank the porter, for he has allowed us to share in the passion and suffering of our Lord.” That’s freedom.

I read an article by opinion columnist Charles Blow last week, entitled “The Civil Rights Act of 2020,” that reflected on the needed changes to bring right relationship among the races and ethnicities in our country. He quoted **Martin Luther King** saying in 1967, “The practical cost of change from the nation up to this point has been cheap. The limited reforms have been obtained at bargain rates. There are no expenses, no taxes are required for Negroes to share lunch counters, libraries, parks, hotels and other facilities with whites.” But he knew that the next steps toward righting past wrongs would cost something. Things like ensuring quality education, decent good-paying jobs, fair housing—these things that would allow equal access to possibility, success and safety, would cost money.

Is that what has kept racism and an underclass alive in our country—fear of it costing us something?

Is that what keeps Christians immature—a fear that following Jesus more intensely will cost us something? **Do we tame the Eucharist, turning into a thing we merely consume to console us? Or is it in fact, as St. Paul says, a participation in the Blood of Christ and a source of strength for us to offer our lives daily to God, even some days at some cost?**