

HOMILY — CORPUS CHRISTI A

Deut 8:2-3, 14-16

Ps 147 **R.** *Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.*

1 Cor 10:16-17

Jn 6:51-59

On Holy Thursday we celebrated the institution of the Mass and of the Priesthood. Today, we celebrate a special feast in honour of the Holy Eucharist itself, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

The Church has celebrated this feast for almost 800 years now, as a means to remember and celebrate the tremendous gift of the Eucharist. And so this feast, then, is one of great joy and gratitude, because the gift that we celebrate today — the Eucharist — isn't a mere 'friendly meal' or some symbolic sharing of bread and wine; the gift we celebrate with this Solemnity is the gift of Jesus Himself, given to us on the Last Supper and on the Cross in flesh and blood.

As we hear in during the Eucharistic Prayer at each Mass, Jesus, at the Last Supper, said, *Take this ... for this is my Body...* and *... this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant...* (Words of Institution). Now every Sacrament in the Church happens through a combination of word and an action — in Baptism, the minister says *I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, as he pours water on the child; in Confession, after sins have been confessed, the Priest lays his hands over the penitent and says the formula of absolution; in Marriage, the couple give themselves to each other through their vows at church, and then fulfil that gift bodily in the marital act.

The words of gift that Jesus makes of Himself at the Last Supper are fulfilled in body on the Cross, where He literally gives us His flesh and blood for our salvation. When we put these two parts together — the words of the Last Supper and the gift on the Cross —, we have the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

This is the Mass! It's the gift of Christ made present for us today, so that we might receive from Him that very gift of His flesh and blood, that we might be fed and strengthened by His sacred Body and Blood.

And just as when a husband and wife come together to give of themselves to each other in body, so too, in the Eucharist, Christ's love for us is expressed and our love for Him is strengthened.

In receiving the Holy Eucharist we're united to Jesus in the most intimate communion possible in this life. So much so that, through it, we receive His divine life, for through Communion, His Body and Blood live in us and work in us to transform us ever more into His image and likeness. *Become what you eat!*, St. Augustine used to say.

This is why the Church speaks of the Mass as the source and summit of the Christian life. Source, because it's through the Body and Blood of Christ given to us on the Cross that we've

been saved; it's through the Body and Blood of Christ given to us in Communion that we're made into more perfect disciples and are strengthened to live the Christian life.

Summit, because it's through the Body and Blood of Christ celebrated at Mass that we offer to the Father the greatest gift and thanksgiving possible, and through that, experience our most sublime heritage as the people of God; and because through the Body and Blood of Christ, God makes Himself near to us, not just in Spirit, but also in Body.

These are challenging truths we celebrate today, and they always have been. As we heard in John's Gospel, many disciples found it hard to believe in what Jesus said: *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*, they asked (Jn 6:52). And many even abandoned Jesus as He continued to explain how His Body and Blood are true food and drink (Jn 6:66).

The Church continues to profess this same truth today: the bread and wine that we offer at Mass truly does become, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ. And so, the Communion that we receive, then, is none other than the Body and Blood of Christ: the same Body that was *given up for* us on the Cross; the same Blood that was *poured out for* us on the Cross.

This is the food with which our Lord feeds us on our journey of faith; this is the extent to which He loves us; this is the gift that we celebrate today and receive at every Mass. There can be nothing greater in this life than to witness this miracle of God's love and to receive this gift for our life and our salvation. This is why the Eucharist is sacred; this is why we celebrate with joy!

The Eucharist is our glory as children of God and a foretaste of the eternal communion promised us through the covenant of Christ's Blood. May we continue to grow in our love and understanding of this great mystery, so as to better appreciate and adore this wondrous Sacrament. Amen.