

Homily of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ Year C

In the first reading, Abram brought tithes to Melchizedek the priest of Most High God. Melchizedek had a celebration of bread and wine with Abram, and blessed Abram. The Book of Hebrews writes about Melchizedek, "There is no mention of father, mother or genealogy; nothing is said about the beginning or the end of his life. In this, he is the figure of the Son of God, the priest who remains forever" (Hebrews 7:2-3). The celebration of bread and wine foreshadows the Eucharist which Jesus celebrated during the Last Supper. St. Paul recalls the Last Supper in the second reading. "The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This is my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

During the Last Supper, Jesus did not say, "It is like my body." Or, "It resembles my body." Or, "It is in place of my body." He said, "This is my body." "This is my blood." This is why we believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. This is why we adore the Body of Jesus in the tabernacle. When we come into a Catholic Church and see a tabernacle and a tabernacle light, we know, immediately, that the Eucharist is present in the tabernacle. We are required to genuflect in reverence. Jesus is no longer physically with us, but he has left himself spiritually with us in the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic celebration is the highest prayer of the Catholic Church. The Eucharist celebration is not a prayer service. The feast of today is the center of the Catholic Faith. The Eucharist is the most distinctive mark of the Catholic Church. We must guard it with pride, respect, honor and reverence. Someone advised priests and indeed all Catholics, "Take each Mass as your first Mass, your last Mass and your only Mass." This means that we are required to give every Eucharistic celebration our maximum attention and participation. The command that we continue to celebrate the Eucharist is the last will of Jesus. Just as we take people's last will seriously, more so, we are to take Jesus' last will very seriously. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1324) writes, "The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

We are to receive the Eucharist reverently and worthily. We do not receive the Eucharist because "it is time for Holy Communion," or because everyone in the pew is proceeding to the sanctuary to receive. We must not disregard what St. Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, "Let each one, then, examine himself before eating of the bread and drinking of the cup. Otherwise he drinks his own condemnation in not recognizing the body." This is why the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps us to prepare for the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

During the Penitential Act at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration the priest invites the faithful, "Let us acknowledge our sins and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries." During consecration the priest prays, "Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you by the same Spirit graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration, that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose command we celebrate these mysteries." This means that we celebrate many mysteries in every Eucharistic celebration. It follows therefore that we receive many graces from participating in the celebration of the sacred mysteries of the Eucharist and in receiving the Eucharist worthily.

The sacred mysteries of the Eucharistic are food for our spiritual journey. They give us spiritual nourishment just as material food gives us physiological nourishment.

The sacred mysteries of the Eucharist have transformative power. They give us graces to become whom we receive.

The sacred mysteries of the Eucharist are the commemoration of the sacrifice of Jesus for our sanctification, for expiation of our sins and for our salvation. It is for this reason that we celebrate the Eucharist for the living and the dead.

The sacred mysteries of the Eucharist are efficacious prayers for physical and spiritual healing, and for deliverance from evil forces.

The sacred mysteries of the Eucharist are our communion with the Trinity, the angels and the saints. The sacred mysteries are a foretaste of the heavenly banquet after our life here on earth.

God answers many prayers during the celebration of the sacred mysteries of the Eucharist. This is why we celebrate the Eucharist for various intentions.

The many benefits of Eucharistic celebration need to encourage us to participate actively and attentively in the celebration and to receive the Eucharist worthily.

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