

Homily of Corpus Christi - The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ Year A

Jesus celebrated the first Eucharist during the Last Supper. "Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves....' Then he took the bread, and said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you'" (Luke 22:14-20). This is why every Mass is a re-enactment of the first Mass. St. Paul reminds us in the second reading that the cup of blessing we bless is a participation in the blood of Christ; and that the bread we break is a participation in the body of Christ. Jesus commands us to break the bread and share the cup in his memory.

In the passage from Luke quoted above, and in the Gospel of today, 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, we see a tabernacle and a tabernacle light, we know, immediately, that the Eucharist is present in the tabernacle; we genuflect in reverence. Jesus is no longer physically with us, but he has left himself spiritually with us in the Eucharist.

The Mass is the highest prayer of the Catholic Church. The Mass is not a service, but a Eucharistic celebration. The feast of today is the center of the Catholic Faith. The Holy 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 of us, "Take each Mass as your first Mass, your last Mass and your only Mass." This means that we are required to give every Mass our maximum attention, participation and prayers. 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.

We are to receive the Eucharist with honor, adoration and worthily. We do not receive the Eucharist because it is "time for Holy Communion," or because everyone else in the pew is proceeding to the sanctuary to receive. If a person knows he or she is not worthy to receive Holy Communion, the person can receive a blessing from the priest, the deacon or the extra-minister of the Eucharist. We must not disregard what St Paul says 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.

We receive many graces when we participate at Mass. Below are listed some of the graces:

One, the Eucharist is food for our spiritual journey. The Eucharist gives us spiritual nourishment just as material food gives us physical nourishment. We suffer spiritual malnutrition when we deny our soul the Eucharist. However, not everyone receive the Eucharist at Mass. Therefore, the word of God we receive is also food for our spiritual journey. Psalm 118:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my path."

Two, the Eucharistic celebration is a powerful prayer for forgiveness of our sins. The Eucharistic celebration is the sacrifice of Jesus for our salvation. Therefore, many prayers of the celebration of the Mass are for our expiation and sanctification.

Three, the Eucharistic celebration is a powerful prayer for physical and spiritual healing. That is why we make effort to take communion to the sick that are unable to come to Mass, and we pray for their healing and strength.

Four, the Eucharist is a powerful prayer against the Evil One and all forces of darkness. That is why the Mass is celebrated where there is influence of the Evil One or where there is suspicion of Evil One's influence.

Five, the Eucharistic celebration is our communion with the Trinity, the angels and the saints. It is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet after our life here on earth. The Eucharistic celebration is our worship and thanksgiving to the Trinity.

Six, the Eucharist has transformative power. It gives us the graces to become whom we receive.

Seven, God answers many prayers during Eucharistic celebration. This is why we are encouraged to offer Mass for our various intentions. We have already noted above that the Mass is the highest prayer of the Catholic Church.

Eight, during the celebration of the Eucharist souls in purgatory are released into heavenly freedom. This is why we celebrate funeral Mass and also celebrate Mass for the souls of our departed ones, imploring God to forgive them their sins.

The many benefits of the Eucharistic celebration should encourage us to participate actively and attentively in the celebration.

Fr Martin Eke, MSP