

Homily of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Year B, 2024

Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 126:12-13, 15-18; Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

At some point in every important relationship, a covenant becomes necessary. Such a covenant is a well worded agreement, oral or written, and some form of symbolic act, recited or performed to concretize the relationship. Everyone involved in the relationship is required to be faithful to the covenant. We are in a covenant relationship with God. We are God's covenant people.

When the Israelites reached Mount Sinai, God invited Moses to the top of the mountain and gave him the Commandments and instructions on how the people would make a covenant with him. The first reading tells us how Moses carried out God's instructions: "Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, 'All that the Lord has said, we will do.' Then he took the blood and splashed it on the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words'" (Exodus 24:5-8).

God promised the Israelites, "Now, if you obey me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, though all the earth is mine. You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4-6). God's directive and promise extend to us.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he made a covenant with the apostles who represented the Church. We read in today's gospel, "While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, 'Take it; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many'" (Mark 14:22-24). When the apostles received and consumed the body and blood of Jesus, the covenant was ratified on behalf of the Church and all of us.

The second reading from Hebrews calls the covenant of Jesus and his Church "a new covenant" (Hebrews 9:15). The new covenant is different from the old covenant: "For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ ... cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God" (Hebrews 9:13-14). Our relationship with God is purified and sealed by the Blood of the Lamb (Hebrew 9:20); "For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). St. Paul writes, "In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins ..." (Ephesians 1:7). St. Peter cautions us, "Realize that you were ransomed from your futile conduct ... not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ ..." (1 Peter 1:18-19).

As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, it is important to re-emphasize why the Catholic Church believes and teaches the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. During the Last Supper, Jesus did not say, "It is like my body." Or, "It resembles my body." Or, "It represents my body." He said, "This is my body." "This is my blood."

The Catholic Church believes and teaches that the mystery of transubstantiation takes place during the Eucharistic celebration at the prayer of consecration. At that time, bread and wine become the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ.

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.

Therefore, we are to receive the Eucharist reverently and worthily. We must not disregard 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.

Before the Israelites left Egypt, God instructed them to celebrate the Passover, which was a sign of spiritual nourishment for the journey to the Promised Land. The Eucharist is food for our spiritual journey. We who celebrate it and receive it need to know and experience its power. Eucharistic miracles and testimonies are countless. We are, therefore, encouraged to participate actively and attentively in the Eucharistic celebrations, adorations, and pilgrimages, and receive the Eucharist worthily. As we do these, may we experience our own Eucharistic miracles. The greatest Eucharistic miracle is to be transformed and become Christ-like. St. Augustine of Hippo challenges us when he says, "Behold what you are; become what you receive." The Eucharist we receive should make us exclaim like St. Paul, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

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