

Homily of Corpus Christi, Year C, 2025

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:1-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 9:11-17

In the first reading, Abram brought tithe to Melchizedek, the priest of Most High God. They had a celebration of bread and wine. Their celebration foreshadowed the Eucharist, which Jesus celebrated during the Last Supper. St. Paul recalls in the second reading. "... 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, "This is a symbol of my body and blood." 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 Eucharist. When we come into a Catholic Church and see a tabernacle and a tabernacle light on, 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. If we see only the crucifix, we are required to bow in reverence.

The word "Eucharist" is derived from the Greek word "eucharistia," which means "thanksgiving." During the Last Supper, Jesus took bread and "gave thanks" to God. In today's gospel, Jesus took "the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing" (that is, he gave thanks). Therefore, the Eucharistic celebration is doing what Jesus did, giving thanks to God. We give thanks to God for the gift of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice, for Jesus' continued presence with us in the Eucharist, and the Eucharist being our spiritual food, which nourishes us and empowers us for our earthly journey. The Eucharist is also called "Holy Communion," meaning that by celebrating and receiving the Eucharist, we are in union with Christ and the entire Church. In Igbo language (Nigeria), "Holy Communion" is called "Oriri nso" (holy food). Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (John 6:54). St. Cyprian calls the Eucharist "the food of salvation."

The Eucharistic celebration is popularly called Mass. When the Eucharistic celebration used to be in Latin, the priest ended the celebration by saying, "Ite missa est," literally meaning, "Go, you are sent to witness what you have celebrated. "Mass" is a coinage from "missa."

The Eucharistic celebration is the highest prayer of the Catholic Church. The Eucharist is the most distinctive mark of the Catholic Church. We must guard it with pride, respect, honor, and reverence. Someone advises 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 Mass our maximum attention and participation.

The command that we continue to celebrate the Eucharist is the last will of Jesus before his arrest and death on the Cross. 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 receive. 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.

It is a mystery that we celebrate the Eucharist many times each day and many times each weekend, and we do not ever get enough of it. The power of the Eucharist is such that wherever the Catholic Church gets in and begins to celebrate the Eucharist, the Church increases and multiplies. While the number of Catholics appears to decline in some places due to some challenges, the number is exploding in some other places. The world population of Catholics increases from year to year.

No one is capable of fully comprehending or explaining the mystery of Transubstantiation (changing of bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Jesus). Everything either written or preached about the mystery is only scratching the surface. Who is capable of comprehending and explaining the comingling of heaven and earth that takes place during the prayer of consecration, and the result is the "Holy Food" which we receive and consume? That is why St. Paul encourages us to recognize the immensity of what we receive.

There are many moments of grace during the celebration of the Eucharist. It is impossible for anyone to consciously attend and participate in the celebration and miss all the moments. One's moment of grace may be during the hymns, or prayers, or liturgy of the Word, or offertory, or spiritual or physical Holy Communion.

As we celebrate this Mass, may we experience moments of grace. May we experience many answered prayers. May we experience the saving power, the forgiving power, the nourishing power, the transformative power, the healing power, the protecting power, and the deliverance power of the Eucharist. Amen.

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