

## **Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ**

Today, we are celebrating the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. This special Feast is celebrated in remembrance of Jesus who gave His life for our salvation and commanded us to celebrate the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in his memory. The Feast owes its existence to Blessed Juliana of Liege, who began a devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in around 1230. Largely through her insistence, in 1264 Pope Urban IV commanded its observance by the universal church. The Feast sums up three important confessions about our Faith. First is that God became physically present in the person of Christ, True God and True Man. Secondly, God continues to be present in His people in the form of the Mystical Body of Christ in his church. And thirdly, the presence of God in the form of bread and wine is made available to us on the altar at Mass and preserved there for our nourishment and worship. Our liturgy today recalls the scriptural origins of this devotion. In the Gospel, we have the miracle of the multiplication of loaves where Jesus generously gives food to the people and makes them partake in the Thanksgiving meal.

The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is in accordance with the command of Jesus to us, to celebrate as a community in his memory, the last meal, where he gave us the Holy Eucharist. During His ministry on earth, Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from Heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world.” With these words Jesus offered his life for the sins of humanity. During the Last Supper Jesus taught His followers the manner in which the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist should be celebrated. He also told them that He would be physically present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist and will be with them till the end of times. But his sacrifice was complete on Calvary when he shed his last drop of blood and water for the sake of humanity. This offering is a gift, and every gift involves the giver and the receiver. It is a sacrifice to the giver and gift to the receiver. Jesus here uses the symbol of a meal to make us realize his presence.

Every Eucharist takes place in the context of a community. In this Communal Sacrificial Meal celebrated by the Community, we have the presence of Jesus who is the victim, the altar and the priest. He offers himself to the Father as a special offering for the

reconciliation of the world. The Eucharist is offered and shared in a community as a fulfillment of the final mission of Jesus to save the world. In this communal sharing, there is no difference in caste and creed and language as all partakers are equal. Several elements are involved in the word Eucharist. It is symbolic, it is a sacrifice, it is a meal, it is a memorial meal, and it is done in the community and is celebrated by the church. God is present in the world and the universe in several ways that are symbolic. Several images were given in the Old Testament, such as the cloud, mountain, thunder, lightning, wind, tent, Temple, fire and so on. People believed that God was there, and they worshiped him.

The institution of the Lord's Supper is the ultimate act of love of Jesus towards his disciples and all others who believe in him. The irony of this setting is that, previous to this action, Jesus had announced to his disciples that one of them was about to betray him. The intimacy of table fellowship was sharply contrasted with the act of betrayal by one from among them. Jesus had the Passover meal with the disciples, but the details are not given to us. Mark tells us that as they were eating, Jesus took some unleavened bread, said the traditional blessing, broke it and distributed it among his disciples. "Take this," he said, "this is my body." It is not just his physical body but his whole person and everything that Jesus stood for through his life, words and actions. As he gave them the bread, he identified it with his mission and vision of life.

Jesus gives his disciples the Eucharist. Eucharist means thanksgiving and blessing. We express our gratitude to God for all the gratuitous gifts God has given us in Jesus and we offer back to him the gratitude in the form of bread and wine. Eucharist means a Blessing. Blessing actually means prayer of praise and glorification for all the Lord God has done for us in Jesus. It is a meal shared by the community in the name of Jesus. It is a sacrificial meal, meaning it is an offering to God as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus uses here the symbol of a simple meal to show his presence to us and chooses to remain in the form of simple bread and wine, a poor person's meal. Here we should emphasize more the community dimension of the celebration of the Eucharist which is often missing. A priest merely presides and leads the community in the sacrifice.

Eucharist in the church can be understood as a communal sacrificial meal, offered by the community of believers along with the priest, to the heavenly Father together with Jesus for the remission of sins and as an offering of gratitude and thanksgiving. The Eucharist is essentially and of its very nature a community action in which every person present is expected to be an active participant, and the priest presides over it. We are here, on the one hand, recalling what makes us Christians in the first place – our identification with the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. And that identification with Jesus is expressed not through a one-to-one relationship with him but in a community relationship with him present in all those who call themselves Christian. We relate to him through his Risen Body, which is the whole community bearing his name. There is no place in Christianity for individualism. It is a horizontal faith: we go to God with and through those around us.

It is a sacrificial meal, where Jesus is the victim, the altar and the priest. He offers himself to the Father as a special offering for the reconciliation of the world. It is offered in a community with no difference in caste and creed and language. It is a fulfillment of the final mission of Jesus to save the world. Therefore let us prepare ourselves to receive the Lord worthily and as we break the bread at the Eucharistic table, we ask for the grace to be worthy of the Lord's mystery and be his instruments to bring his unity and charity into the world. Eucharist is a gift, not just to be adored and revered, but also to be consumed, digested and lived by every Christian. What were once the simple gifts of bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of our Savior – the new covenant between God and mankind. It is not a private gift, but a communal one. When the priest holds up the consecrated Host and the cup of wine and says, "This is My Body – this is My Blood", he is also saying, for Jesus, "you are my body... you are my blood!" Jesus gives us His Body and Blood.