

Corpus Christi – C

Today we complete the trifacta of solemnities that immediately follow the Easter season: Pentecost, when we reflect upon the mystery of the Church, the feast of the Holy Trinity, when we reflect upon the mystery of God, and now today, Corpus Christi, the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, when we reflect upon and celebrate the mystery of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. A mystery of our faith is not a mystery that can be solved but rather something that we can keep going deeper and deeper into. Imagine going down into a cave, and the further you go into, the more passages you discover, going deeper and deeper into the earth. Every now and then you come across a huge cavern, and the caverns keep getting bigger and bigger the further you go. This is like the mysteries of our faith – endlessly deep, expanding more and more the further we go.

And the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ is no different. Today we celebrate the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity, in the Eucharist. And truly this is a great mystery: how a priest takes ordinary bread and wine, and by repeating the prayer Jesus Christ made at the Last Supper, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, transforms them into Jesus' own Body and Blood – how can this be possible? It goes beyond what our brains can fathom. And yet if God can become a human being, while at the same time remaining God, he can most certainly transform bread and wine into his own Body and Blood.

This is one of the all or nothing deals of our faith – either the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, or it isn't. Either it is an incredible miracle, or it is a fraud. It can't be anything in between. But this is what we believe as Catholics. And it is a very bold claim, one that in a way forces us to either assent to it or reject it. But it is

not an arbitrary claim; it is rather based on both Scripture and Tradition.

First, Scripture: let's take look at our readings today. In our first reading, we hear about how Melchizedek, "the king of Salem" – now called Jerusalem by the way – took bread and wine and said a prayer of blessing. Melchizedek is a mysterious figure – he comes out of nowhere and is never heard from again. But his action in this reading from Genesis, despite being so brief, is that of a priest making an offering to the Lord. His priesthood precedes even the Levitical priesthood of the Israelites. The Letter to the Hebrews connects the priesthood of Jesus to the priesthood of Melchizedek, one that goes back beyond the covenant God made with Moses and the Israelites on Mount Sinai, all the way back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people.

And then in our second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we hear an account of the first Eucharist. St. Paul tells us that at the Last Supper Jesus took bread and wine – like Melchizedek – and said a prayer of blessing over them. We have here a sort of Eucharistic formula: Jesus took the bread, said a prayer of blessing or thanksgiving, broke it, and then gave it to his disciples. It's the exact same pattern we hear in the accounts of the Last Supper from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And we hear this pattern repeated in our Eucharistic prayer at Mass: Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and then gave it to his disciples.

Where else do we hear this pattern? In our Gospel reading today, the well-known story of how Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fish. As we hear, there wasn't enough food for the thousands of people who came to listen to Jesus. The disciples came to Jesus because they didn't know what to do. All they had were five loaves

and two fish. And what did Jesus do? He took what they had offered, said a prayer of blessing, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. This is the same Eucharistic formula that Jesus repeats at the Last Supper – a foreshadowing of the Eucharist.

And at the Last Supper, when Jesus takes the bread, he says, “This is my Body, given for you.” And when he takes the wine, he says, “This is the new covenant in my blood.” This IS my body; this IS the new covenant in my blood. And then he adds, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

So there you have, very briefly, the Scriptural basis for why we believe the bread and wine become Jesus’ Body and Blood at Mass. And we also have the basis of Tradition. That’s Tradition with a capital T: an often misunderstood word, which comes from the Latin *tradere*, meaning *to hand on*. As, for example, St. Paul says in

our second reading today: “I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.” Tradition is simply the handing on from one generation to the next, from one Christian to the next, what we believe. Another example of Tradition is the account of the meaning of the Eucharist that St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in a letter to the Christians of Smyrna: “Consider those who are of a different opinion with respect to the grace of Christ which has come unto us, how opposed they are to the will of God. They confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins, and whom the Father, of His goodness, raised up again.” He wrote this around 100 A.D., not long after the death of John, the last of the apostles. Or we have the account of St. Justin Martyr, in a letter he wrote to the Roman emperor sometime in the 2nd century, seeking to give an explanation of the beliefs of Christians, in which he described the Eucharist as the Body and Blood of Christ.

So here we have the basis, from Scripture and Tradition, of what we believe about the Eucharist, that it is Jesus' very Body and Blood. And so, if this is what we believe, what then should be our response to it? We ought to recognize that the Eucharist is a pure gift from God. A true gift is not something that we can earn, nor is it something that we should expect or demand or think we have a right to. A true gift is freely given and freely received. And our response to this gift should be one of humble gratitude and thanksgiving. The word *Eucharist* in fact means thanksgiving – and that should be our response to the Lord for this gift of himself that he gives us.

And we should also respond to this gift with awe and devotion. If this is the Lord Jesus Himself, we should treat the Eucharist not casually but with reverence. That's why we genuflect to the tabernacle when we enter and leave church, because Jesus is present there. That's why we bow when we come up to receive communion. That's why we should fast from anything other than

water for at least one hour before receiving communion. (That shouldn't be very hard to do, by the way, since much of that hour we are in church anyway.)

Jesus gives us his Body and Blood as a pure gift, and even though we cannot and do not earn it, we still ought to prepare ourselves to receive it. Which is what the fast is also intended to do: to make us think and be more intentional about Who it is we are going to receive. Also because the Eucharist is not a magic pill that automatically changes us and makes us holy. We have to cooperate with Christ in the work of our sanctification. We have to dispose ourselves to receive the grace that He desires to give us. So we should prepare ourselves to receive the Eucharist through daily prayer, through the sacrament of reconciliation if we have committed a serious sin, and through works of love and mercy. If we do this, the grace that Jesus desires to give us will be at work in us, and we will grow in holiness.

Jesus gives us the Eucharist as our spiritual food. He nourishes our body and especially our soul on our journey through this life. And through the Eucharist, Jesus also accompanies us on this journey, until we come face to face with Him. Now let us go forward to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, with reverence and gratitude for this awesome gift He has given us.

- **June 22, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**