

+ J. M. J.

If we had to equate an image with today's feast, the solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, we would probably associate it with tradition procession of the body of Christ displayed in a monstrance. Today we celebrate with perhaps greater fervor indeed what we celebrate at Mass in order to highlight what is so important about the Blessed Sacrament. In that light it would be good to review what it is we believe about the Eucharist.

To understand the Eucharist we need to remember the sacrificial system of the Israelites. When an animal was sacrificed the body and the blood were separated. The blood, the life of the animal was used to purify the sanctuary. The body was both offered to God and a portion was given back to the people, which they would eat. It is in the eating of the sacrifice that somehow, those partaking became part of the very offering.

Notice the parallel between the Eucharist. At this table we remember the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross for the forgiveness of sins. We remember in a way that the one sacrifice is re presented here at Mass.

When the priest repeats the words of Jesus over the bread, **"this is my body,"** and over the wine, **"this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant,"** the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine becomes the blood of Christ. We call this presence whole or real to indicate that we receive Jesus completely even as we receive the tiniest particle or the smallest drop. Even though the body and blood retain all the properties of bread and wine, it is by our faith that we can assert that what we receive is the body and blood of Christ. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote **"Though our senses cannot see; Faith alone which is unshaken Shows pure hearts the mystery."** It is in this faith that we respond amen to the minister. It is through the eating of Christ's sacrifice that we are united with Christ and offered to God. It is in the drinking of the blood that our sanctuary, our bodies are purified.

Why did God pick bread and wine? I can't answer that completely. Consider though what Jesus says to the Twelve regarding the crowds **"Give them some food."** It is out of Jesus' great compassion that he feeds the crowd and he feeds us, which prompted St. Thomas to say **"To ensure that the memory of so great a gift would abide with us for ever, he left his body as food and his blood as drink".**<sup>1</sup> Jesus allows us to take food elements which have been common and easily accessible to humankind for generations and allow the work of our hands to become our spiritual food.

We then have to remind ourselves that when we receive Holy Communion we receive Jesus who is God, physically inside our very bodies. We should be cognizant of that fact and not take so great a gift nonchalantly. We would do well to examine our consciences or as St. Paul says discern the body to ensure we do not approach so great a gift conscience of having committed and not sacramentally repented of grave sin. We then take those moments when we have Jesus really present inside us to worship him, adore him, thank him, ask him for whatever we most need, or simply to enter into contemplative, loving prayer with our Creator who loves us so much.

The forgiveness of sins, the offering of the body of Christ to God, communion with all those who partake is what this great sacrament is about. There is no other way that purifies us or brings into the presence of God as does the Eucharist. That's why taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of the whole Christ life.<sup>2</sup> This is the highpoint! Everything we do this week we should get strength to do because we receive Jesus Christ today, and everything we do this week we should do in great anticipation and preparation for the time that we will next gather together in communion to receive our Lord. Sadly, I don't see in the demeanor of some who approach. Our actions really speak to our personal beliefs. I wonder if some of you think this is ordinary food that you receive or take it for granted. I can't

**Comment [DC1]:** Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you do not have life within you.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas: *LH*, Solemnity of Corpus Christi, OR.

<sup>2</sup> LG 11.

comprehend what is going on in the minds of those who leave right after communion without even praying. Do you have any idea who it is that you just received?

My friends, many of you know that I have now been a priest for a year. I hope that all my actions have conveyed that what we do here on Sunday, the meal that we partake is the center of my life. Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament has changed my life. My hope and prayer is that each day each of us will experience perhaps an even more profound impact.

May the body and blood of Christ bring us to everlasting life.

