



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 18, 2017

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Scriptures

Today's Solemnity is a celebration of the Eucharist. The Scriptures chosen for this day guide our understanding of this great gift and give us reasons to rejoice.

When the Israelites arrived at the Promised Land, Moses gathered them together and delivered the speech heard in today's First Reading. Before entering the land they had been promised, Moses wanted the people to understand that their experience getting there was not some random fate. They had been chosen by God, rescued by him, saved from slavery, cared for by him, and tested by him. Everything they had undergone - the hunger, thirst, the harsh conditions, and the dangerous threats - was allowed by God, so that they might experience, and learn to trust, his absolute love for them. Moses mentioned manna twice. Their very real fear of starvation had caused their trust in God to falter, yet God never abandoned them. In his great love for them he provided a steady source of food in a desert so that they would not perish on their way to the Promised Land.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals that he is the Bread of Life, sent by God to give eternal life. Just before this teaching, Jesus had fed 5000 people; afterward, crowds pursued him everywhere. Jesus could do more than fill their stomachs, so he challenged them to pursue food which would never perish by believing in him. The people wanted a sign before believing-- something even greater than the miraculous manna that God had given their ancestors in the desert. Jesus responded by saying that those who had eaten manna eventually died, but if they ate of the bread that he would give them, they would have eternal life.

Then Jesus began to speak of his flesh as food and his blood as drink. People were confused and shocked. Many left him. Still Jesus insisted that his flesh and blood were true food and drink. His flesh and blood would be offered for them; if they accepted him as their food and drink, they would have not only eternal life but Jesus would always remain in them in this life. Those who left could not understand how Jesus could be living Bread or how he could be food or drink. Those who stayed would learn how this could be possible when Jesus again offered himself as food and drink at the Last Supper.

Every Eucharist invites us to remember that Jesus gave his life, his body and blood, to reconcile us to God and restore us to eternal life. At every Eucharist, Jesus invites us to receive his Body and Blood as food and drink, so that we can be filled with his life in the present as we wait for him to raise us up to eternal life. In the Second Reading, St. Paul reminds us that sharing the Eucharistic meal is a participation in the Body and Blood of Jesus that makes all believers one with each other, just as they are one with Christ.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a

One does not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God.

- Moses reminded the Israelites that God has taken care of them in the desert, and they should trust him.
- Moses reminded them that everything they have comes from God.
- Manna sustained them as food in the desert and the Word of God sustained their spirit.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 147: 12-13, 14-15, 19-20 . Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

We are the Body of Christ when we participate in the Eucharist.

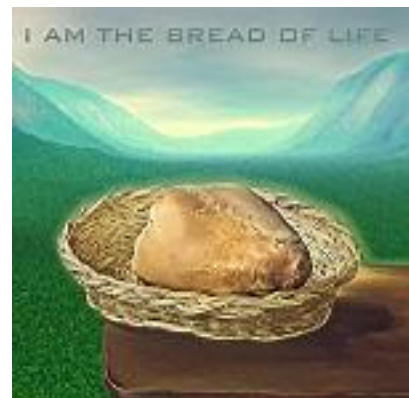
- The life of Jesus sustains our life.
- Sharing his life bonds us together as one.
- We are the Body of Christ when we share the Eucharist.

Gospel: John 6:51-58

The Word of God made flesh, Jesus, declared he was the Bread of Life.

- Jesus is the Word of God made flesh.
- Jesus is the Bread of Life.
- His flesh given for the world was a pledge of our resurrection.

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Called Into Communion

The author of this Sunday's selection from Deuteronomy (we'll assume he was a man, because women didn't have the leisure time to learn to read and write) was writing history in the form of a homily he attributed to Moses. Narrating what happened when God provided bread "back then," he was really addressing an audience living hundreds of years after the desert trek. This author wrote because he knew that the Exodus adventure was not a one-time event and people of other ages would need to appropriate it for themselves.

Moses gave his people one command in two forms: "Remember" and "Do not forget." What Moses wanted the people to remember was that in their wandering when they were fed up with God and afraid they would die, God remained with them, putting up with their complaints and seeing to it that both their basic and their deepest needs were met.

In those days our ancestors in the desert gradually became fearful that they had let their hopes and dreams carry them too far. Freedom had sounded great when they were in Egypt under the thumbs of their taskmasters, but when the road ahead appeared interminable the vision in the rear-view mirror looked better than it ever had before. They had left slavery, but for what? Hope was not solid enough to calm their hunger nor wet enough to slake their thirst.

Moses reminded them that in spite of their fears, they didn't die. The water from the rock was not as good as Perrier and the mysterious manna might have been as insipid as it was nourishing, but they didn't perish just because they didn't have everything they wanted. In fact, they learned that God could be counted on to take care of them, never leaving them to face their perils alone. They came to recognize God's loving presence through their times of trouble.

Moses did more than hint that the Israelites had needed every one of the 40 years of that trial in order to learn faith. Their want slowly led them to understand what was truly important. Eventually, the vision in the rear-view mirror lost its luster, and they understood that they could survive with very little as long as God was with them. If they hadn't learned that important lesson, they might have remained forever unable to distinguish between what gives life and what simply satisfies an appetite.

From the days of Exodus we fast-forward a few centuries to see a crowd pressing Jesus to keep them miraculously supplied with free bread. The problem Jesus faced was that the people who sought him remembered the story of Moses

in the desert, but they didn't remember what their ancestors had learned there. Jesus was offering them bread, but it was the bread of life, the bread of commitment, the bread of following him through suffering into the real life of union with God. Instead of allowing themselves to comprehend that he was offering his life for them they refused to go beyond the level of the literal. They mocked him. Perhaps afraid to take him seriously, they jeered as others would at the crucifixion: "How can this man give us his flesh (his mortal self) to eat?" Like a new Moses, Jesus was inviting them into his own Exodus through death to life. He was inviting them to receive him as the Father's gift and become one with him, but they only had an appetite for a miraculous supply of bread.

What St. Paul tells the Corinthians in today's second reading offers a commentary on Jesus' offer to be living bread for us. Speaking of the community's eucharistic meal, Paul reminds his people that eating and drinking in the name of Christ implies being united with him in his self-giving, in his dying and his rising. It is communion, not a free lunch.

Between the 13th and the mid-20th centuries, Catholics often celebrated this feast with elaborate public processions that focused on Christ's miraculous presence in the consecrated host carried aloft. The readings the church has chosen for this feast change our focus from the symbolic procession to a contemporary Exodus. Today's Scriptures lead us to realize that celebrating the Eucharist calls us to go out of ourselves, to move beyond our preferences and appetites and to take up Jesus' offer of communion with him. This is a journey that will be every bit as frightening and grace-filled as the one on which Moses led his people. Our advantage over our Israelite ancestors is that we can learn from their experience and go beyond it. Christ promises us not just his presence, but the communion that gave him life.

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