

Body and Blood of Christ A (John 6:51-58)

Today is the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. In the olden days, we would call it the feast of Corpus Christi. Catholic belief in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is probably one of the most characteristic beliefs of us as Catholics. We reserve the Blessed Sacrament in tabernacles in our churches. People drop in to pay a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and to pour out their hearts, sharing with Jesus the secrets of their lives and struggles and trusting Jesus to be there for them.

Very often in our history, this feast was celebrated with a solemn procession. Begun in the latter part of the 13th century, the Corpus Christi procession had already become a universal custom by the beginning of the 15th century. The people who walked in the procession did so with the conviction that they were carrying the most Holy One into every aspect of their lives. It is one thing to be nurtured by the Eucharist; it is yet another thing to carry that sacred Eucharistic experience with us into our daily world, so much in need of sanctification.

Our second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians has provided us with some of the oldest narratives we have of the Eucharist. It was already a tradition in the Church, telling us that the Eucharist was celebrated right from the beginning of the Church's history. "Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ?"

The Eucharistic meal is an event involving our whole being. When we first think of the body and blood of Christ, we probably think in terms of the food given us by Jesus on that night before he died, and that it is. Yet it is so much more! Even in our daily lives a meal has the ability to transform the action of eating into the formation of a community. Sharing a meal goes far beyond the occasion of satisfying bodily hunger. Coming together to share a meal satisfies our much deeper human need for companionship. It actually brings about the bonding of unity. In the same way, receiving and consuming the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist provides wonderful and unlimited nourishment for our spiritual journey. It provides the opportunity for relationships to flourish; for selfish interests to give way to loving concern for others; for lives dulled by self-centered apathy and boredom to be enlivened with new and life-giving energy.

At the same time sharing this particular meal promotes and brings about our unity with Christ Jesus. We all share in that promise of Jesus that in eating his body and drinking his blood we receive life from him and he, in turn, lives in us, more intimately than any other kind of intimacy.

Once again, God has taken the initiative. The history of salvation remains a history of God's almost uncontrollable love for each and every one of us- uncontrollable in the sense that God seems unable to approach us in any other way. Our challenge is to love as a Eucharistic community which understands the full impact of what it means to share in the body and blood of Jesus Christ, to share in God's own life, to bring us together as a caring community that reaches out to others. And so we give thanks.

Al Grosskopf, S.J.