

The Feast of Corpus Christi: The Body and Blood of Christ



I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world....Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in Me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. (John 6:48-58, New American Bible)

This solemn feast of Corpus Christi commemorates the institution of the Most Holy Eucharist which Jesus celebrated with his apostles on that first Maundy Thursday. It was instituted in the 13th century as a separate feast from Maundy Thursday due largely to the advocacy of an Augustinian nun in Belgium, Saint Juliana of Mont Cornillon, who believed honor to the Eucharist in the Holy Week triduum was overwhelmed by sadness in the remembrance of Jesus' Passion and death. She believed honor to the Eucharist and the Blessed Sacrament warranted a solemn feast of great joy and thanksgiving all its own. Her desire increased when she had a vision of the Church under the appearance of a full moon having one dark spot, which signified the absence of such a solemnity. A local synod was held in 1246 and the first feast of Corpus Christi was celebrated the following year in her own diocese. Since Juliana died in 1258, before the feast was extended to the whole Church, her cause was left to her long-time friend Eve.

Before Juliana's time, a great Eucharistic miracle took place in the 8th century in Lanciano, Chieti, Italy. A Basilian monk, suffering doubts in the Real Presence of Jesus in the consecrated Host, saw before his very eyes the Sacred Host visibly changed into Flesh, except in the center where the appearances of the sacramental species remained intact. Today this Host-Flesh is visible in a silver monstrance which dates back to 1713, while the Blood is kept in a crystal chalice fixed to the monstrance base. Many believe this is the original chalice in which the miracle occurred. There have been 4 scientific investigations, the latest in 1970, by renowned laboratory research men in the medical field who have

concluded: 1) The Blood is real blood and the Flesh real flesh. 2) The Flesh is composed of cardiac muscular tissue. 3) The Flesh and Blood belongs to the human species. 4) The blood groups of the Flesh and Blood are the same, coming from the same person, group AB, the same as in the Shroud of Turin. 5) Protein in the Blood is fractionated in the same percentage ratio as found in the serotherapeutic table of fresh and normal blood. 6) In the Blood are chloride, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, and sodium in a reduced amount, while calcium is in larger quantity. These men concluded that the hypothesis of a forgery is without foundation and this 1200 year old miracle is thus scientifically upheld.

Similarly, in 1263, a few years after Juliana's death, a German priest also suffering doubts of faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the consecrated host, stopped at Bolsena while on a pilgrimage to Rome. At the words of consecration blood began to seep from the consecrated Host and trickle over his hands onto the altar and the corporal. The confused priest went to see Pope Urban IV in nearby Orvieto who ordered an immediate investigation. Thereafter the Host and linen cloth bearing the stains of blood were brought to Orvieto where the Pope, Cardinals and other dignitaries met the procession amidst much honor, and then placed the relics in the cathedral. The linen corporal bearing the spots of blood is still reverently enshrined and exhibited in the Cathedral of Orvieto today.

Pope Urban IV then had St. Thomas Aquinas write an office honoring the Eucharist as the Body of Christ. One year after the miracle, in August of 1264, Pope Urban IV issued the bull *Transiturus*, ordering the Feast of Corpus Christi to extol the love of our Savior as expressed in the Eucharist to be observed throughout the entire Church on the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday. When Pope Urban died that year, the feast was again delayed until Pope Clement V ordered its adoption at the General Council of Vienne in 1311. By 1325 the feast was adopted throughout Europe and England and spread from there. In the United States the solemnity is held on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday. Many customs, such as processions through town with wreaths of flowers, grew up around the devotion, but have been lost with time. Today there is a resurgence of these devotions.

The Holy Eucharist as the Paschal Sacrifice and memorial banquet are pre-figured in the sacrificial rituals celebrated by the Chosen People as dictated in the Book of Leviticus for the purpose of worshipping the one true God and celebrating their Covenant with God and His with them. There are basically 5 different sacrifices: burnt offering; cereal or grain offering; peace offering; sin offering; and guilt offering. A burnt offering was the bloody sacrifice of an animal, burnt on the altar to atone for sin and to express the desire to devote one's life completely to God in holy living. The cereal offering was a gift of grain, flour and oil in gratitude for God's providential care for His people. The peace offering was often associated with a vow to God and remembered the Covenant and its fellowship with God and others. The sin offering was the most common offering to atone for the unintentional sins, the human condition, of the individual or the nation. The guilt offering was a more serious atonement where restitution was required at 120% of the original value of the item of concern. All sacrifice, bloody or unbloody, involved some cost to the one offering it, and spoke to those essential attitudes of worship, atonement, covenant and fellowship.

Interestingly, the bread that was part of the grain offering could not contain any leaven, for leaven is a bacteria and signifies sin. Nor could the bread have honey in the mixture to sweeten it, for honey changes the *real taste* of the bread. Sometimes, where blood was let, blood would be sprinkled on the altar or even on the people. And with the burnt offering, it was fire from above that consumed the gift on the altar.

These sacrificial rituals were offered for deliverance from sin and to celebrate God's nuptials with His people. The Eucharist, likewise, is a re-presentation of Christ's bloody death, the unblemished Lamb of God slain for our sins on Calvary, made present on every altar in an unbloody, sacramental manner as a wedding banquet of Christ with His Church. At the words of consecration the bread and wine become the *Real Presence* of Christ's Body and Blood offered for and to us to make us one Body with Him, the Bridegroom of His people. That Precious Blood poured out on Calvary brought forth the Church which now pours out the Saving Grace of Christ over all of us in her Sacramental rituals that celebrate our new covenant with God. In the Eucharist we are sealed in Christ's Blood, like the homes of the people during the first Passover, to save us from eternal death. In that same blood, which is the life of the Body, we celebrate ourselves as Church, as Christ's living Body. Just as the grain of old was un-leavened to be free of all bacteria, so our communion bread is unleavened, for it becomes Jesus, the sinless, All Holy, All Pure One of God, Whom we eat so we may become pure and holy, too. Just as the bread of old could have no honey to change its taste, so Jesus did not sweeten nor dilute His words, which some who followed Him thought were too hard: "Unless you eat My Body and drink My Blood you shall not have life within you." Jesus says exactly what he means and means exactly what He says!

As a sin offering or purification had to take place before the Jewish sacrifice could be offered, so each Eucharist begins with a penitential rite for the forgiveness of our unintentional sins, venial sins that result from our sinful human condition. The actual sacrifice is Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Perfect Sacrifice Who truly atones for our sins, unlike animal sacrifices which only signify atonement. Not only is Jesus the perfect sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, but He is the Eternal High Priest Who, as God and man, perfectly represents humanity before the throne of God. As the people of old read from the Torah, so we read from Sacred Scripture during the Liturgy of the Word. As the Jewish people offered their grain and peace offerings to acknowledge God's care of them, so we bring our bread and wine and monetary gifts to say "thank you" for God's blessings and to ask Him to continue to provide our daily bread as He provided manna for His people in the desert. The word Eucharist means "thanksgiving." Our God is so gracious He has given us His own Son so we would have a perfect gift to offer back to Him to say "thanks." And He fixes that moment of Jesus' saving death on the cross in an eternal presence before His Face, an endless prayer on our behalf, for He is without time. Every moment is a "mercy hour," for at every moment of every day the Eucharistic liturgy is being celebrated on some altar some place in the world! Jesus is our peace offering reconciling us to the Father and bringing us the forgiving peace of the Father in Trinitarian love. The Our Father, the meal prayer Jesus taught us, expresses this clearly: "Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Forgiveness is God's way to

peace, as Jesus reminds us: "If you are about to offer your gift at the altar and remember your brother has something against you, go first to be reconciled, then come back and offer your gift."

Baptism, the first sacrament we receive, which is necessary to receive the others, plunges us into Christ's Paschal Mystery, God's work of redemption. The Eucharist, however, because it is the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Himself, is the greatest sacrament of all. Unlike the food we eat which becomes part of us, when we eat the Eucharist we become part of Jesus! The Eucharist, a remembrance of the Passover Meal and sacrifice that delivered God's people from slavery and set them free, is also our Passover Sacrifice and Meal that delivers us from slavery to sin so we might "pass over" from our sinfulness into His promise of eternal glory. O how great is this mystery of transubstantiation! This memorial meal! This perfect sacrifice! The Eucharist is truly our greatest prayer, for it is the perfect intercessory prayer of Jesus, our only Mediator before the throne of the Father. He is the first *Laudem Gloriam*, the Alleluia to God, the song of thanksgiving and praise to God's Holy Name. He is our blessing cup, the wine of joy in our valley of tears, a taste of heaven that keeps us burning for more! He is the desire of the ages, the insatiable hunger in our hearts! When God sent Jesus into our world, He gave us His Heart, for Jesus is the Heart of the Trinity. All He desires is that we give Him His Heart back, along with our own. **Let us heed these wondrous words Our Lord Himself spoke to Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, visionary of the message of Our Lady of America®, as recorded in a letter to Father Paul Leibold, her spiritual director, in 1958.**

On Holy Thursday Jesus came, holding on His hands the Host and the Chalice, saying: "I am the Host of every communion. I am Life to all who partake of Me. They who do not eat Me will die, for no one can live who does not partake of Me, for I am Eternal Life.

Come, beloved souls, poor sinners so dear to the Heart of your Host. Come receive Me that you may live and enjoy everlasting happiness in the Kingdom of My Father Who is your Father also. This I have obtained for you through My Body and Blood sacrificed for you on Calvary and become your Food and Drink in the Holy Mass offered constantly for you. Do not disappoint My hopes for I have waited long, oh so long for you. (All letters are copyrighted and may not be reproduced without expressed written permission.)

**"I have waited, oh so long for you!"
And I am waiting oh so long for you, dear Jesus!**

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