

FEAST OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST B CYCLE 2021

First Reading: Exodus 24:3-8 (This is the blood of the covenant the Lord has made with you)

Responsorial Psalm 116 "I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord"

Second Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15 (The blood of Christ will cleanse our consciences)

Gospel: Mark 14:12-16, 22-26 (This is my body. This is my blood)

♪ *A-men. El Cuerpo de Cristo. A-men. La Sangre del Señor*

Eating your body, drinking your blood, we become what we receive. Amen, A-men ♪

How many languages are in that refrain? [3 or perhaps 4]

English, Spanish, Hebrew & Latin [Amen is both Hebrew & Latin.]

Do you know what the Spanish words mean?

El Cuerpo de Cristo "The Body of Christ" *La Sangre del Señor* "The Blood of the Lord."

That song is a meditation on the meaning of this feast, and of the Eucharist itself.

"We become what we receive." What incredible words! What a wonderful gift.

The refrain sets to music the truth that we not only **receive** the body & blood of Christ, we **are** the presence of Christ in our world. That's why I always sing an extra acclamation three times during the Eucharistic prayer, ♪ *We are the body of Christ.* ♪

St. Augustine, at the Easter Vigil in his cathedral church in Africa, said,

"Behold the Body of Christ, see who you are & be what you receive."

His words were echoed by several Popes & theologians. Pope Benedict quoted them in 2007.

Our **challenge** is to say "Amen" to the call to **be** what we receive." The more we can live that call, the more we proclaim with our lives that we are one Body in Christ and one human family

But it's not automatic. We are *offered* the gift, but we need to accept it & live it.

And that can be dangerous.

Ben Salmon was a devout Catholic who refused to participate in the 1st World War in 1917 because of the teaching of Christ in the Beatitudes - **"Blessed are the peacemakers,"** and the commandment of God, **"Thou shalt not kill."**

He was arrested and given a sentence of death. Even though this sentence was commuted, he died in 1932 because of his treatment in prison. Some chaplains refused to give him Communion & the Bishops of the US at that time condemned him. His cause for sainthood is now being pursued by the same church that had rejected his vision of peace earlier.

Ben Salmon answered the call of the Gospel & lived the invitation to become what he received.

You can learn more about him at www.bensalmon.org

You heard the word *blood* several times in the readings today. It occurs 8 times in the 3 readings. What does it mean to worship and receive the Blood of Christ?

For the Jews, then and now, blood is sacred. Why? Simply because all life belongs to God and, as the Book of Deuteronomy says, *"life is in the blood."*

In the Scripture, blood is a symbol of & even a synonym for **life**. A Jew of Jesus' time might say "respect for blood" and mean the same thing as we would when we say "respect for life." When we receive from the cup, we revere & receive the *life* of Christ. So when you hear the words, "the blood of Christ" think of it as "the lifeblood of Christ."

At Mass, what we remember & make present is the blood of the covenant brought about by the death & rising of Christ. The blood of the animals sacrificed in the first reading is used to express the covenant between God and the people.

In a sense, they become "*blood brothers & sisters*" with Yahweh and each other.

That is the background for the words of Jesus in today's Gospel, which reflect how he lived his life, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.*" The word translated as "**many**" in the Gospel, would mean, for the Jews of Jesus' time, **everybody, all people**.

That's why I sing in the Eucharistic Prayer, "*This is ...the blood of the new and everlasting covenant; it will be shed for you & for ALL so that sins may be forgiven*".

The Good News and the constant teaching of the Church is that the life of Christ is poured out for the whole human race and his love goes beyond his own time and must go beyond any one nation or political party or language or religion, or parish or diocese in our own time.

The teaching about the Body & Blood of Christ challenges the racism of every age. I heard this Gospel Truth from an 87 yr. old woman named Jane Elliott.

Her simple & profound message is: "**God only created one race, the human race**".

In 1968, the day after Martin Luther King Jr was murdered, she did an experiential exercise to explain racism for her 3rd grade class in a small Iowa town. She helped them to feel what it was like to be put down or to feel superior because of a physical characteristic. In this case, it was whether they had brown eyes or blue eyes. The brown eyed children were told that they were inferior to the blue eyed children, and were treated accordingly by the blue eyed children.

The next day they switched positions. They were told it was an experiment, but they took it seriously and acted it out. These young people were affected by this for the rest of their lives but Mrs. Elliot and her family were persecuted & condemned by parents & the community because of the truth she made so obvious and had to move out of the town.

<https://janeelliott.com/>

It is scientifically true that we are all related to each other in our basic DNA. We're all at least 30th to 50th cousins. In the history of humanity, we were only divided into black, red, yellow or white races in 1735, less than 300 years ago.

The truth that we are one human race is not only scientifically & historically true, it is part of the message of Jesus who loved us so much that he became a part of the **human** race.

After reflecting on all this, I changed my answer on the census questionnaire that asked for my race. I did not check the box marked "white" and checked the one on the bottom marked "other" and wrote in "**human**."

We are grieving the effects of systemic racism in our country & all over the world. This form of condemning the "other" and claiming to be superior because of race or nationality or privilege is not only a denial of our common humanity, it is a denial of our faith in the Body & Blood of Christ.

Jesus himself invites all of us to share in his life. That is why he invited the ones gathered in that upper room to eat the bread that he called his own body and to drink from the cup of his precious blood. Because of Covid, during the last 15 months, only the priest has been able to receive from the cup. We look forward to the time when that is possible for all of us again, but we can still recognize and reverence the real presence of Christ in the consecrated wine.

One theologian summed up the meaning of the Eucharist we celebrate today, and the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ by saying: "*When we receive the Body of Christ, we eat the Church. When we receive the Blood of Christ, we drink the cross.*"

To receive the bread of life at communion is to express our solidarity with all the others who are loved by Christ. To reverence his presence in the consecrated wine is to accept his cross and to anticipate his rising.

When we say "Amen" to Christ, when we receive him at Communion in any form, we agree to share the **suffering** of all who, like him, are victims of violence and are gifted with the **hope** of all who believe in his kingdom of justice, love & peace.

Through our Baptism and our very humanity, we are blood brothers & sisters. The more we become what we receive, the more any violence will be more clearly seen as violence against members of our own families.

We may not be called to endure arrest & incarceration because we witness to the non-violent Christ, as Ben Salmon was, or be rejected & persecuted because we tell the truth of our common humanity like Jane Elliott, but to the extent that we live out of that vision, we can begin to be part of the healing of the wounds caused by violence & racism. The more we grow in being able to see who we are and be what we receive, the closer we move towards the truth of this song:

*♪ We are many parts, we are all one body, and the gifts we have , we are given to share.
May the Spirit of love make us one indeed. One the love that we share,
one our hope in despair, one the cross that we bear.*

This is the link to the Mass at St. Patrick's in Ravenna on June 6, 2021. Friar Peter is the presider and homilist. Sr. Anna is assisting at Communion. <https://youtu.be/j6BpLJzJmwo?t=768>