

Corpus Christi – Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ ~ 2014 OLF, OLV

First Reading: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a [God gave you manna & water in the desert].

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 147 [Praise the Lord, Jerusalem]

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 [Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body]

Gospel: John 6:51-58 [Whoever eats this bread will have eternal life]

♪ 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. ♪

That refrain celebrates this feast in 3 languages: English, Spanish & Hebrew. *El Cuerpo de Cristo* - the Body of Christ. *La Sangre del Señor* - the blood of the Lord. *Amen* - yes, it is so!

Whenever I hold up the body & blood of Christ at Mass, I say words that reflect that hymn. They are based on the words of St. Augustine at the Easter Vigil in his cathedral church in Africa, "Behold the Body and Life-Blood of Christ! See who you are, and be what you receive." We are called to honor Christ in the Eucharist, but even more, we are called to be Christ for one another and to see Christ in each other because we are the body of Christ. That's why I invite you to sing during the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass, ♪ *We are the Body of Christ* ♪

This feast is a challenge to become what we receive. It is a challenge to receive who we are, to see who lives in us, to accept Christ as the guiding spirit of our lives. The Body of Christ is not only the host we receive, it is the community which he brought into being. The blood of Christ is not only the consecrated wine we drink, it is the life of Jesus in us that makes it possible to live his love & truth.

The Gospel passage today, which is only 7 verses, uses the word "life" & "living" in different forms no fewer than NINE times. We hear not only a promise that we will *live* forever, but a call to make our *life* today a living sacrament of the life of Christ in our world. When I think of the Blood of Christ, I remember a verse from the Book of Deuteronomy, "blood is life" [Dt. 12:23]. For the Jews of the time of Jesus, and even of today, blood was a symbol of life - so it is accurate to say that we drink the life of Jesus when we receive communion. That's why I say, "Behold the body and *life-blood* of Christ."

This feast used to be called *Corpus Christi*; that's Latin for *el Cuerpo de Cristo*, the Body of Christ. Now it is called the feast of the Body *and Blood* of Christ.

Did you ever wonder why the Roman Catholic Church returned to the ancient practice of offering communion under the form of *both* bread & wine to all at every Mass? This had been the universal practice until around the 11th century, and it still is in the Eastern rites of the Catholic Church, but for 8 centuries drinking from the cup was only allowed by the priest. About 50 years ago that was changed, after the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960's.

The answer is both simple & profound. First of all, Jesus said, "Take this, *all of you*, and drink from it." Second, to drink from the cup is to remember that Jesus loved us so much that he shed his blood on the cross. When we drink from the cup of the precious blood of Christ, we obey his command to take up his cross & follow him.

Finally, to drink from the cup is to express the hope that the life that Jesus promises does not end with death, but continues in a celebration at the banquet table of heaven. The Spirit that guides the church encourages each of us to accept the invitation of Jesus to drink his Precious Blood from the cup & receive his Sacred Body in the host. The Church gives us this feast so we can reflect on why we receive the Precious Blood & eat the Bread of Life & have this become a part of our conscious choice to receive Jesus in this sacrament.

When we see each other as the Body of Christ, we are living St. Paul's vision in the 2nd reading, "we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." It is true that we are a Body in need of healing, but we have been given the love and truth of God's Spirit.

One theologian summed up the meaning of the Eucharist we celebrate today, and this 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.*"

If we recognize Christ in *ourselves*, and choose to **be** Christ for others, the Church will be renewed and become a more credible voice for life and peace for the world. If we recognize Christ in *others*, even in those who are different from us and may disagree with us; if we realize that we meet Jesus in those in need in our communities, our country & the world; if we hear the voice of Christ when he says "I was in need and you reached out to me," telling us that we meet him in children & mothers crossing our borders, in inmates in the prisons that are crowded with our brothers & sisters, in the homeless and the hungry and the mentally ill, it becomes possible to build a society and a living Church which reflects the vision of Christ and the justice, love and peace of his kingdom.

Sr. Anna and I met Christ in several ways this past month. We met him in a woman from Michigan, whose husband we buried a few years ago, & in the couple who welcomed her into their home in Troy. We met Christ in someone who drove from Syracuse and met us in Frankfort for spiritual direction & lunch. We met Christ in a man who has been incarcerated for 18 years and always asks how we are when we visit him or he writes to us.

We have been meeting Christ almost every weekend since Easter when we see your faces and hear your voices raised in song or in conversation [at Our Lady of the Valley in Middleburgh and Our Lady of Fatima in Delanson] - and we will miss seeing you so regularly, but we will be meeting Christ in other places and through other people whom we know or have not yet met. We will be strengthened on our journeys by the support of your prayers.

To honor the whole of creation is to honor the Body and life-Blood of Christ. St. Francis called creation *sacred*. The land, the water, the air - all reflect God who is good. Pope Benedict & Pope, now Saint, John Paul spoke & wrote often about our responsibility to protect the air, water & land God has given us to cultivate. Pope Francis is preparing to issue a new encyclical on our call to care for creation.

In caring for the gift of the earth, we become missionaries to the poor & to future generations. And these are the ones who are most hurt by the damage done to the water we drink, the air we breathe and the land we cultivate. As Catholics, we like to call ourselves pro-life - and we should be *proud* that we are - but sometimes we forget that care for creation is a radically pro-life activity - to care for creation is to care about children - both those who have been born and those still in the womb, to care for their parents and for the unborn of future generations. The harmful consequences of greed and lust for power on the environment are *most* easily overlooked when they affect the poor and powerless, and future generations.

There is a song which reflects the essence of this feast. It was composed by Joe Uvegas, who grew up in this area.

♪ Receive who you are, do not be frightened. Come say "Amen" to all of your life.
Open your heart, come and be lightened, Singing I am the Body of Christ.

And I am the Body of Christ, singing I am, dancing I am.

And I am the light of the world Cause I see who lives in me, Yeah, Lord, I receive. ♪