

Commentary to the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

The Body and Blood of Christ



When Albania was still a Communist nation, Mother Teresa paid a visit to her homeland. In the office of the Communist dictator, she heard him say defiantly, "Jesus will never return to Albania while I am in charge." The ninety pound wizened woman was laughing to herself all the time. She was carrying Jesus in a pyx pinned to her sari by a cheap safety pin. She believed Jesus had returned to Albania under the appearance of bread.

When push comes to that famous shove, it doesn't matter what Mother Teresa or you or I believe about the Eucharist. What does matter is what Christ Himself believes about it. For the answer one must go to the record. Today's Gospel of Mark is as good a place to start as any.

The Master, who had a great fondness for the simple declarative sentence, spoke His mind clearly on the question. In clean, unqualified prose, He said, "...this is my body...this is my blood." If Christ meant the Eucharist to be nothing but a symbol, He chose the worst kind of language to express His

intentions. But, as history attests, Jesus was a master of words before whom even Shakespeare must bow.

One of the oldest symbols for Jesus the Christ in Christian art is the pelican. It is not a pretty bird, but it does deliver the goods. When fish are foolish enough to swim near the water's surface, the pelican dive-bombs to retrieve them for its young. However, when fish prove smarter than the pelican and stay deep in the waters, its children need not wonder where their next meal is coming from.

The pelican bites into its flesh and blood to feed its brood. This is precisely what the Christ does for us. Nor does He wait for an emergency like the pelican. Rather, He gives Himself to us each day of the week. There are limits to human affection and generosity but, happily for us, not to Christ's.

In John 14:18, Jesus promised He would not leave us orphans. He has kept His word. He has left Himself to us in the Eucharist. Today we salute His thoughtful generosity on this seven hundred year old feast of the Body and Blood of Christ.

It was not by accident that the Teacher chose bread to represent His flesh. It is one of the staples of our life. It can be made easily and quickly even by neophyte cooks in the most primitive ovens. Or it can be purchased for a few coins. One finds it on the tables of both the poor and rich at every meal all over the world. Jesus is reminding us as graphically as He might that His presence with us is not confined merely to grand occasions. He is ours whenever we wish. Bread is both a healthy food and a wonderful energy supplier. Transfer the latter characteristics into spiritual language and one must heartily applaud the choice of Christ. He takes everyday table bread and by His divine power turns it into **WONDER BREAD**.

Psalm 104:15 advises us that God gives us wine to gladden our hearts. What better drink then could Christ have chosen than wine to represent His blood? If bread fills our stomachs, then wine gives wings to our spirits. Christ not merely puts simple food on the Eucharist table, but also He has not forgotten to give us rich desert. In any list of the great hosts of the world, one must find Christ's name. He leaves nothing to chance. He thinks of everything. His is a five star operation. If we are spiritually undernourished, it is not the fault of the Master.

Once we receive the Eucharist, "the seed of God," as Meister Eckhart would remind us, "is in us. As pear seeds grow into pear trees and as nut seeds grow into nut trees, so God seeds grow into God."

With the Eucharist, we should be transformed people.

Many people about us are anxiously seeking a sign of God's concern and love for them. Unhappily they are in the same position as the shipwrecked sailors who were dying of thirst. They shouted hoarsely to a native on shore for water. They were completely unaware their lifeboat had drifted into a fresh water cove. The native shouted back to them, "Dip your bucket where you are." Perhaps you and I should play the role of that native this week for our own family and friends. We should urge them to dip their bucket into the Eucharist.

The monk says, " Being close to Christ is not a prize He challenges us to earn. It is a gift He invites us to accept."

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