

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 18th 2017

Today is a very special day in the Church and I am humbled to reflect on these readings and the sacred meanings of this day. While the Feast of Corpus Christi was not celebrated in the Church until 13th Century, the reason for the celebration is certainly much earlier -- this “feast” really started on Holy Thursday, when at the Last Supper, Jesus gave His body and blood to the disciples. His sacred body and blood were freely given up for all of us on Good Friday. Sometimes the sorrow of that time may overshadow the beautiful gift that was given on Holy Thursday. A lasting gift and one that we are privileged to have available to us. The idea of our Father providing life-giving nutrient to us is mentioned in other places in the Bible as we see in our readings. A unique part of today’s reading is the Sequence written by St. Thomas Aquinas as a special prayer of celebration for this important feast.

Our first reading, Moses reminds the people that God directed the journey throughout the desert and when they thought they would die of starvation provided manna. Manna was something they had never had before, it was unknown to them – a heavenly substance that nourished the body and renewed the soul. Yet, they did not fully grasp the depth of that gift and of the gift that was to come.

The very short second reading is so beautiful in its simplicity: Brothers and sisters: The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. One of our parish priests says a similar statement when he holds up the host and the chalice as we are invited to the Supper and humbly proclaim our unworthiness at Jesus even entering under our roof yet faithfully acknowledging that our soul will be saved. Every time he says that, I am moved with the thought of partaking of the body of Christ. I know that every priest states This is the Body of Christ but the words from this reading always strike to the depth of my heart. The other aspect of this reading is the concept of being one body. The lovely St Louis Jesuit song of One Bread, One Body echoes this notion. From my background reading on this feast day, I think it is safe to say that another aspect of this celebration is the idea that the Church is one body. As part of that body, we have an obligation of service to the rest of the body. We are connected to each other through Christ. Here in this temporary place called earth, we are challenged to live as a member of that body, a part of a whole, incomplete on our own.

In the gospel, Jesus is explaining to the people the new “manna” for them – that which will nourish and sustain them – not their physical being this time but their spiritual being. It is His body and blood that will save us – first as He sacrifices himself for us but also each time we receive His body and blood. Today’s Solemnity allows us to embrace this gift. It is a time for us to give great thought not only to the blessings that we have received but also to the expectations of being given eternal life.

How do we live this gift? How do we fully embrace it in all its meanings? In the USA this year, this Solemnity falls on Fathers’ Day. While that is not the case through the world, I find it comforting to think of our Father and how He provides for us in every way. Some of us no longer have our earthly fathers with us, some may not have the father that they needed, and, of course, many have caring, nurturing father – yet all of us, share the same loving Father who gave us his only Son, that we would be saved. Our brother, our Christ, who gives us His body and blood that whoever eats this bread will live forever. The enduring presence of Christ strengthens and sustains us. The body of the Church unites us not only with Christ but with each other. In Ignatian spirituality, we are called to be Women and Men For and With Each Other, sharing in the life of Christ and living His mission.

