

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord: Reverence for the Eucharist

Today's celebration focuses on the Gift of the Last Supper, the Gift of the Eucharist. This feast is relatively new in the Church. It was instituted in the thirteenth century through the influence of St. Julianna of Monte Cornellion, sometimes referred to as Julianna of Liege. She was deeply devoted to the Eucharist and wanted others to stop their lives for one day and celebrate this great gift. In 1246, she persuaded her bishop to make this a feast day for the Diocese of Liege. Pope Urban IV declared it to be a Feast for the entire Church in 1264.

Today's feast is meant to help us grow in the understanding of the Eucharist and in our reverence for this great sacrament. We certainly need this reminder. We have the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle behind our altar, but many times we ignore this Presence and treat the Church merely as a meeting place. We need to genuflect when we enter a pew and then spend a few moments in prayer, recognizing the One before whom we are kneeling.

There are many ways that the Lord is present. He is present in the beauties of nature, and in the smile of a baby. He is present where two or three are gathered together in His Name, and He is present in the Word of Scripture. But the greatest presence of the Lord possible for us on earth is the Real Presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

This is a day for us to reflect on what exactly happens at Mass. Bread and Wine become the Body and Blood of the Lord. They do not symbolically become the Lord. They become the Lord. They do not signify the Lord. They are the Lord. Communion is not just the union of the community. It is the union of the community with Jesus Christ, present in each person who receives communion and present in all of us together. I visited a Diocese once where the Bishop emphasized this by having everyone who receives remain standing and singing until the last person in the community received, and then the entire community knelt together and prayed silently with the One who united them.

When we receive communion we are united through Christ with those present here and those present throughout the world. I knew a young couple who often were apart on Sunday's due to the husband's traveling for work. They used to try to go to Mass at the same time so they could be united together in the Eucharist by the One who united them together in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

There is room for a little Eucharistic theology here, something far deeper than we could present to our little children when they are prepared for their First Holy Communion. At Mass, the substance of the bread and wine are changed, whereas the accidents, the appearance remains the same. Let me try to explain this mystery this way. Many of you have dogs. When you go home, your dog will jump on you, lick you, and act as though you have been away for a month. Of course, if you have a cat, your

cat will just ignore you. But back to your dog. You might look at your dog and say something like, "How's my Fuzzy-wuzzy today?" Now what if your dog were to answer "Well, I'm a bit baffled by the fourth chapter of the third book of Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. I was going over it today. Do you think he developed his concept of analytic and synthetic propositions from Descarte or do you think his thought is rooted in Plato?" You would look at your dog and say, "Fuzzy-wuzzy?" Or you might say, "Immanuel who?" But you would realize that somehow your dog was no longer a dog, but a rationale human being in a dog's form. The rationale human being part is the substance, the dog part is the accidents.

In the Eucharist, the bread and wine looks like bread and wine, and it has all the physical qualities of bread and wine. If you were to look at a consecrated host in a microscope you would see molecules relative to bread, not human tissue or human blood, the accidents have not changed. But the substance has changed, it is now the Body and Blood of Christ.

By the way, last Sunday we celebrated the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity. We recognized that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have the same one substance. They are God. We pray in the creed, *consubstantial* with the Father, having the same substance. But in the Eucharist the substance changes. The bread and wine become Jesus.

When we receive communion, we receive Jesus. When we approach the Eucharist, we need to do this in a reverential manner, focusing in on the One we are about to receive. It is important for our parents to remind their children continually that they need to receive the Lord with reverence. We need to spend time praying to the Lord within us. These prayers may consist in the communion hymn we share, but should also include quiet time of reflection, time to talk to the Lord within us.

Once the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, they remain the Body and Blood of Christ. That is why we reverence the Blessed Sacrament in our tabernacles. That is why we spend time before the Blessed Sacrament when we have Eucharistic Adoration.

I am shocked and saddened when I hear about people who leave the Catholic Church and join other faiths. I do not doubt their good intentions. Nor do I doubt that they can have an experience of God's presence in another worshiping community, but how can we, who have been called to the Eucharist, ever leave the Eucharist? Certainly, there are many good holy people who have not been called to the Eucharist. But we have been called. Once we have been admitted into this Presence we cannot leave it. The beliefs of those of other denominations are to be respected. The beliefs of those who do not acknowledge Christ are to be respected. But we are not respecting others if we hedge on our own faith. No, we need to be who we are. We are Catholics. We need to exalt in that which makes us uniquely Catholic. We need to celebrate the Great, Awesome Gift of the Eucharist.

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord reminds us of whom we are, who is present in the tabernacles of our churches, and what we are doing when we receive communion.