

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

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord, or as it used to be called, Corpus Christi. This solemnity differs from Holy Thursday when we celebrate the initiation of the sacrament of the Eucharist at the Last Supper and emphasize the union of our reception of the sacrament with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross on Good Friday.

Catholicism runs deep. We cannot simply change faiths because to do so would be to leave the Eucharist. For us Catholics, Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist uniting us to his Passion, Death and Resurrection, nourishing us. Unlike many other Christian Churches we do not believe that the Eucharist just points to the Lord or signifies our union with Christ. We Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the Lord. We believe that when we receive Communion, we receive Jesus within us, sanctifying us. We speak to the Lord within us. When the bread and wine are consecrated during the Mass, the very substance or essence of the bread and wine is changed from the physical to the spiritual. The accidents of the physical makeup of bread and wine remain, but what this now becomes changes into the Lord. We call this the Real Presence. That is why we say that the hosts and the wine are consecrated, not just blessed. That is also why the hosts which are consecrated during the Mass are reserved in our tabernacles after Mass. We can then take the Real Presence of the Lord to the sick and dying. We also can worship before the Eucharistic presence of the Lord here in Church.

The Eucharist is the meal of the Catholic community, but it is far more than just a meal of fellowship. Each person who receives communion receives the Body of Christ within him or her as individuals. In this way each person is united together to the total Mystical Body of Christ. Our union is far more than fellowship. Perhaps the best example is the one St. John gives: the example of the vine and the branches. The branches of a vine or a tree do not just live in fellowship with each other, they live united to each other through their union to the life giving trunk. We are the branches united to the vine and sustained by the life force of the Eucharist.

Sometimes people ask me or the other priests about non-Catholics receiving the Eucharist or Catholics receiving communion in non Catholic churches. In the Catholic Church the Eucharist is offered only to practicing Catholics capable of receiving communion. For a Catholic, the reception of the Eucharist is an affirmation of the entire faith of the Church. People may share a belief in Christ, and even celebrate a communion service, but not necessarily share a belief in the Eucharist as being the real presence of Christ. A person needs to profess the faith of the community before the person can join the community meal. Our theology does not isolate the Eucharist from the rest of our beliefs. Other faiths do not view the Eucharist as being a total statement of their faith. Therefore, a Protestant Church could very well invite everyone present to receive communion. Should Catholics attending a protestant church perhaps at a funeral or wedding receive communion if they are invited? No, because for a Catholic the reality of communion means something far

more profound than it does for a non-Catholic.

Catholics in the state of grace are invited to receive communion? State of Grace? Do you remember that term? It is used to refer to a person who has not destroyed the life of God received at baptism by committing a grave or mortal sin. If a person has refused to worship, engaged in serious immoral practices, etc, making the conscious choice to put this before God, that person needs to reestablish the life of God through confession before receiving communion. By the way, if a person has any doubt regarding whether that person has committed a serious sin, then the person has not committed a serious sin. A sin is only mortal when it is known to be mortal and has been freely chosen.

Only Catholics who know that they have lost their relationship to God are excluded from the Eucharist. This is an area where there has been a lot of false information being circulated with regard to the situation of people who are separated or divorced. The only people who are excluded from the Eucharist are those who have attempted marriage outside the Church. They are not excommunicated, but they are separated from the Eucharist. If a person married outside of the Church wants to rectify this situation, the Church can investigate to see if the marriage can be celebrated within the Church. This is what we call a marriage convalidation. After the convalidation, the person or people can return to receiving communion. Those who are separated or divorced but not remarried outside the Church are welcome to receive communion. People should not listen to anyone telling them anything different.

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord is a good time for a bit of a refresher regarding proper reverence in the church and when receiving communion. Because we believe that Jesus is present in the Blessed Sacrament within our tabernacles, we need to show reverence in Church. When we enter a pew, we need to genuflect, bend the right knee. If we have bad knees and cannot genuflect, we should bow. Once in our place, we should say a prayer of greeting to the Lord. At communion time we make a gesture of reverence before receiving. Our Diocese has issued the directive that this should be a small bow. Some people genuflect. Some even go down to their knees. Neither is necessary and can tie up the communion line, but if a person's conscience is saying that this is what he or she needs to do, then so be it, as long as the action is one of reverence, not a declaration of piety for others to notice. When we receive the consecrated host on our tongues, we need to be sure that the minister of the Eucharist has access to our tongues. We should not just open our mouths. That often results in the minister's fingers touching the person's mouth. When we receive by hand, we should place one hand over the other, step aside, and then consume the consecrated host immediately. The most important practice we must have comes next. We need to speak to the Lord within us. We need to pray directly to Jesus inside of us in the Eucharist. It is so wrong and so disrespectful to the Presence of the Lord for us to receive communion and then ignore the One within us.

We have been entrusted with the Body of Christ. We must care for this gift properly. The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord leads us to reflect on the

depth of this great gift. The celebration reminds us that when we receive communion, we do not just perform a symbolic action, we receive Jesus Christ. May we do so with reverence.