

**Homily for June 17, 2001
Solemnity of the Body and
Blood of Christ Cycle C**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Genesis 14:18-20
I Corinthians 11:23-26
Luke 9:11-17**

The feast of Corpus Christi is the feast of the Eucharist as the Body of Christ and it is the feast of the Church as the body of Christ.

In our second reading today, I Corinthians Chapter 11, St. Paul's description of the Lord's Supper sits inside a larger context where Paul deals with the problem of divisions in the Corinthian community from where they gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

It seems that one of two things could be happening: A) wealthy persons are arriving at the house church before the poorer members and they begin to eat and drink before the poorer members arrive; or B) after the breaking of the bread, when the main meal begins, the people do not share the food they have brought, and thus, the wealthy eat of their provisions and the poor are left to eat of their much more meager provisions. Whatever the precise problem – and the Corinthians certainly knew what St. Paul meant – owing to those divisions, Paul says, “When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.”

St. Paul then goes on to describe what it was like at that gathering of early Christians to remember Jesus

in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. He encourages the Corinthians to examine themselves so that they eat and drink worthily. He says, “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.” Here St. Paul only mentions the word, “body” because it appears to be Paul's point that if one does not discern the Body of Christ in the people assembled, then he or she has not eaten and drunk worthily. In other words the body and blood of Christ is not just the bread and wine but also the people gathered. Then the body and blood of Christ is bread and wine to our senses. But according to St. Paul the body and blood of Christ is that body which we are, that blood which flows through our veins. It was not uncommon in an earlier era for Christians to speak of the Eucharist as the “Mystical Body” of Christ and of communities of Christians with St. Paul as simply “the body of Christ.”

To receive the body and blood of Christ at holy communion is to enter into Jesus' saving death and resurrection. It is to drink the cup that Jesus drinks. It is to die to our old self-centered, alienated, individualistic identities and rise as new, true selves united with Christ and with one another. It is a

foretaste of the final revelation of the Kingdom of God. Past, present, and future all come together in this one moment. In the words of Thomas Merton, “when you participate in a sacramental action in the liturgy, what happens? There is a telescoping of time. The past, the present and the future are all telescoped. At the Mass, you’re simultaneously at Calvary, and in the Cenacle, and in Heaven. The beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega come together in the Mass. The whole of human history is taking place, and the passion is taking place, and the glorification of Christ is taking place, and the last judgment is taking place. It’s all in one.”

During a retreat, a group of young people said to Milwaukee’s Archbishop Rembert Weakland that they were having a difficult time understanding what it means to be a Catholic. The Archbishop suggested that to really grasp what our Baptism means, they should do two things: first, that they participate in the Eucharist with the same parish community every Sunday for six months; and second, during that same six month period, they work in a soup kitchen for the poor. If you do these two things together, the Archbishop said, you will come to understand what it means to be a Catholic.

In this Eucharist-centered church of ours, we are both guests and waiters. Jesus invites us to his table to be nourished by his body and blood in the bread and wine of the sacrament. Our presence at this table makes us more than diners but a city connected to one another where we find support and compassion from those who come to the table with us. At the same time, the Eucharist makes us become Eucharist for others – to make the limitless, complete love of Christ real for all in our own acts of charity and kindness. Today’s

feast of the body and blood of the Lord reminds us that we are called by Jesus who fed the multitudes to be both guest and waiter, participant and host at the banquet of God.

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