

Homily for June 2, 2002  
Solemnity of Corpus Christi Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a  
1 Corinthians 10:16-17  
John 6:51-58

## *Jesus' flesh and blood, now glorified, is our point of contact with the Father.*

Jesus said, "If you do not eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." It is so easy to hear these words and drift immediately into a distinctly Catholic posture, saying, "Oh, that's the real presence at Mass Jesus is talking about."

That's really not the intention of the author. There was never a question of whether Jesus was present in the Eucharist – the reality of that was taken for granted. The issue for the early Church, the issue for the Johannine Community, was whether or not we can recognize our own flesh and blood to be the glorified flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus. As Saint Augustine preached in his homilies after Easter, instructing the newly baptized, "There you are on the table, and there you are in the chalice."

"Lord, how did you come to recognize your own flesh and blood as divine?" we ask of Jesus. In Saint John's gospel, the author tries to shake and shatter people into thinking that the humanity of Jesus and their humanity could really be one and therefore divine. "Unless you eat, that is to say, unless you gnaw on the flesh of Jesus as if you were an animal feeding

on a carcass, you have no life in you," is in effect how graphic these words are in Greek. To a people obsessed with dietary rules and regulations, this statement is way over the top – and Jesus is going to lose a lot of followers. But that's the purpose of Saint John's gospel here. In Saint John's gospel, Jesus is addressing the conflict between ancient Judaism and the emerging revelation of Jesus as our gateway to the Father through our humanity in touch with Jesus' glorified humanity. Knowing that you become what you eat, the ancients understandably feared eating the wrong thing. But becoming what you eat isn't bad if it's Jesus you're becoming!

The approach Saint John's gospel employs is brutish, but purposeful. The union of God and humanity is to be accomplished in such a way that it is not merely spiritual, some kind of lofty awareness of an ethereal presence. God is realized in us right down to the core of our humanity, in flesh and blood, skin and bones, muscles and guts – dreams and fears – all of our emotions. Jesus experienced all of this, lived all of this, and so do we, and so do we redeem the world we live in with our flesh and blood made holy by our sharing in that of Jesus.

God rejects not the human condition. Rather, the divine plunges heart and soul into who we are. We, in

turn, receive God wholeheartedly, and become who God is. A story is told of prisoners in a concentration camp in the Second World War. One of the Christian prisoners says to the others, "We have no bread, not even water to use as wine, but we will act as though we have."

And so he begins to lead the others through the liturgy, surprised at how many of the words he remembers, having heard them so many Sundays since he was a child. When he gets to the words Jesus said at the Last Supper, he turns to the prisoner next to him. He holds out his empty hands and says, "This is my body, which is given for you."

And so they go around in the circle, one by one, each man turning to the next, opening his palms and repeating Jesus' words: "This is my body, given for you."

In the Eucharist, bread and wine are transformed by the spirit of God into the body and blood of Christ. In turn, the sacrament we receive transforms us into sacraments as well – sacraments of God's love for one another, signs of God's presence to our families and communities. As the Eucharist is the heart of Christ's church of reconciliation, so should the Eucharist make us reconcilers. As the Eucharist animates the Church with the life of Christ, so does the Eucharist we receive animate our lives in the love and compassion of God. As Saint Augustine also says, "If you have received worthily, you are what you have received." Well might we ask the Father through Jesus, "Lord, how did you discover that you were divine?"

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