

## From The Pastor

The feast of The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ has its origins in the twelfth century. In 1264, Pope Urban established this feast for the universal Church. It grew out of an intense devotion to see and know the Lord in the Eucharist. With the aid of an Augustinian nun and the vision she saw regarding the Eucharist, her local bishop assisted in the founding of the feast. It was at this time that the host was elevated at Mass so that the people could see the sacrament for worship and adoration.

Many themes surround this powerful and important feast. The essence of the Eucharist is belief in the real and true presence of Jesus in the elements of bread and wine that become his Body and Blood. Jesus himself initiated the Eucharist at the Last Supper on Holy Thursday. It was Jesus who, out of love, desired to leave a living memorial of his presence for all who would believe in Him.

The Eucharist memorializes Jesus' personal love and desire to be with his own. It also conveys the living truth of his death and Resurrection and its gift in the forgiveness of sins. This is the power and effect of every Mass that is celebrated. Through the sacrifice of the Mass, in the real and living presence of Jesus, the same act of healing, love, forgiveness, and redemption takes place as on the Good Friday Jesus died.

This is the point St. Paul makes in his letter to the Corinthians. Paul points out that the Eucharist takes place in the immediate proximity of the Cross. On the Cross, Jesus becomes food for the world. He is the food and sustenance of mercy, love, and forgiveness. More than the nourishment of bread at a meal, Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross becomes a food that redeems and nourishes the soul with his own divine life. To drive his point home, Paul calls the Corinthians to know that each time they share the Eucharistic meal they are proclaiming the death of the Lord. This death has become our new life in God.

It is significant to note that Paul shares with us what he has personally received from the Lord. Jesus himself has shared with Paul the words and meaning of the first Eucharist. "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me". In the same way, the cup, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me". Beyond the obvious significance of these words, is that Paul was not at the Last Supper. The words and experience are given to him by Jesus. Paul is the first to write these words in faith and witness for the faith community. Most of the letters of St. Paul were written well before the writing of the gospels.

Curiously, the gospel for today is not that of the Last Supper, but of the miracle of the multiplication of loaves. As mentioned, the themes of the Eucharist are many, and far-reaching. This is clearly a miracle story that has Eucharistic themes. Well before the actual Last Supper experience, Jesus was food for the hungry through his self-giving. The story also reveals the power of God in Jesus to heal the sick and multiply bread for the hungry.

The people, universally all people, are hungry in a way that cannot be satisfied by food alone. They seek out and follow Jesus for the food of soul that satisfies the need for hope, and promise, for healing and mercy. So thirsty for this inner food are the people that they forget the day and the practical need for nourishment and rest. This is a good thing. They are so taken by Jesus and his power that even stomach hunger or body tiredness did not lessen their desire for what Jesus had to offer. How often does that happen today? It takes a lot for us to truly forget ourselves and our immediate comforts to open ourselves to the food that Jesus gives.

Some will say the miracle is that when the food came out, everyone who had food began to share, having more than enough for all. This could well be true. Human beings have a tremendous capacity and generosity to share with the hungry and the poor. This is a viable scenario for this story. Or is it?

We have the capacity to share and be generous, but the human spirit still has hungers only God can satisfy. Jesus is revealing more than an abundance of bread for empty tummies. Jesus is revealing the Kingdom of God and the divine power it will reveal. Note at the opening of the reading that Jesus 'healed those who needed to be cured'. Only God can heal the sick by a word or a touch. Jesus did not likely talk to these people all day. It would be too much. The day grew long as so many people waited their turn for a minute with Jesus and his healing touch. Prior to the abundance of bread, Jesus has already provided an abundance of divine power through healing.

When the food issue comes up, the disciples complain and are overwhelmed. Jesus calls them to the task, knowing that only God can provide such abundance. This is a miracle story that reveals the Kingdom of God in God's desire to provide in abundance for the people he has created.

The Eucharist is the ongoing reality of the divine abundance to sustain us in the life and redemption of the Son. I have said Mass over ten-thousand times, and I know, and feel, and believe in the real presence of Jesus. I hope and pray you know the same. Jesus is our food and our life.

Father John Esper