

Meditations: Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer on the feast of Corpus Christi.

- Christ gives himself to us completely
- Banquet, sacrifice and communion
- Jesus goes out today to our streets

THE solemnities that accompany the end of the Easter season are coming

to an end. After Jesus' Ascension into heaven, we celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit, and then the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Today our fervor overflows with joy and thanksgiving for Christ's real presence, his glorious Body and Blood, in the bread and wine on the altar. Since the thirteenth century this feast has been celebrated as an expression of the Church's Eucharistic faith: "Praise thy Savior and thy King; / Praise with hymns thy Shepherd true: / Dare thy most to praise Him well; / For He doth all praise excel." Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote these verses in the *Lauda Sion* sequence used in today's Mass. "That true living Bread divine, / That life-giving flesh adored, / Which the brethren twelve received, / As most faithfully believed, / At the Supper of the Lord. / Let the chant be loud and high; / Sweet and tranquil be the joy / Felt to-day in every breast; / On this

festival divine / Which recounts the origin / Of the glorious Eucharist.”^[1]

In these sacred species – in the bread and the wine – we see God, in his omnipotence, giving Himself to us completely and forever. His Pasch – the mystery of his Passion, Death and Resurrection – did not end, but “participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all.”^[2]

God uses these simple gifts, made from wheat and the vine, to enable us to venerate Christ himself in them. Saint Josemaría saw the Eucharist as a miracle of love that lasts forever: “This is truly the bread for God’s children. Jesus, the Firstborn of the Eternal Father, offers us himself as food. And the same Jesus, who strengthens us here, is waiting to receive us in heaven as his guests and co-heirs. For those who are nourished by Christ will die the earthly death of time, but they will

live eternally since Christ is life everlasting.”^[3]

GIVE THEM something to eat (Lk 9:13), Jesus told his disciples on seeing the hungry crowd following Him. They only had five loaves and two fish, and yet all ate and were satisfied. And they took up what was left over, twelve baskets of broken pieces (Lk 9:17). This miracle is an image of the superabundance contained in the Eucharist for our lives, and also points to the apostles' mission: to be stewards of that grace. Jesus “entrusts to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed.”^[4]

Saint Paul tells us of the tradition he himself had received: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is broken for you"* (1 Cor 11:23-24).

These words capture the early Church's faith in the sacrifice of the Lamb by which sins are forgiven, and also recall the manna with which God fed the people of Israel on their pilgrimage through the desert. Although it is a sacrifice, it is celebrated in thanksgiving due to the abundant fruits obtained from it.

Nevertheless, our Lord's first announcement of this miracle was not well received: *I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh* (Jn 6:51). These words were

a scandal for many and today too they can be hard for people to accept. “The Eucharist and the Cross are stumbling blocks. It is the same mystery and it never ceases to be an occasion of division. ‘Will you also go away?’ The Lord’s question echoes through the ages, as a loving invitation to discover that only he has ‘the words of eternal life’ and that to receive in faith the gift of his Eucharist is to receive the Lord himself.”^[5]

Our Lord, in the Eucharist, gathers us all in his Body, and therefore communion unites us with our brothers and sisters. “The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in Eucharistic communion superabundantly fulfils the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table

to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal.”^[6]

ON MANY occasions, Jesus, the son of Mary, goes out to meet people. In the Gospel we see, for example, how our Lord meets the Samaritan woman at Sychar’s well, how He meets Zacchaeus when entering Jericho, and also Bartimaeus, who suddenly hears that Jesus is passing by. In a similar way, in many places today Jesus will pass through our streets. He comes out to meet us as He did when living in this world of ours.

These processions are a joyful opportunity to adore Him through the beauty of songs and flowers and incense. All the love and devotion put into preparing these processions seem insufficient to us to express our

gratitude to our God. But, besides these external gestures, perhaps the best way we can honor Him is to let Christ live ever more intensely in our own life. “If we have been renewed by receiving our Lord's Body, we should show it. Let us pray that our thoughts be sincere, full of peace, self-giving and service. Let us pray that we be true and clear in what we say — the right thing at the right time — so as to console and help and especially bring God's light to others. Let us pray that our actions be consistent and effective and right, so that they give off ‘the good fragrance of Christ,’ evoking his way of doing things.”^[7]

“Jesu! Shepherd of the sheep! / Thy true flock in safety keep. / Living Bread! Thy life supply; / Strengthen us, or else we die; / Fill us with celestial grace.”^[8] In the Eucharist we have a foretaste of heaven already here on earth. *Ave verum corpus,*

natum de Maria Virgine. “Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary.”^[9]

^[1] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Lauda Sion*, Sequence.

^[2] Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1085.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 152.

^[4] Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1323.

^[5] Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1336.

^[6] Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 24.

^[7] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 156.

^[8] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Lauda Sion*, Sequence.

^[9] Beginning of the *Ave Verum* hymn.

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