

June 7, 2015

Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

This is the bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever

“If you can't find God in each other, it's not likely you'll find God in the Eucharist”

Background

The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ - Corpus Christi - had its origin in 12th century. Exaggerated emphasis on the real presence of Christ led to the exclusion of a fuller meaning of Eucharist. People in the Middle Ages felt unworthy to receive communion; they preferred to look at the Blessed Sacrament. This led to the introduction of the elevation of the host and cup during mass and to public displays of the Eucharist, such as the Benediction devotion.

The fuller meaning of Eucharist

What is the fuller meaning of Eucharist? Franciscan Fr. Michael Crosby, OFM, in his presentation, *“The Eucharist & Justice”* at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in 2007, tells the following story. *“A well-dressed white couple was walking to church when they came upon an Asian woman putting a coat on her young daughter. They gave an impatient shrug, made a face and went on their way. On the church steps, an elderly black man, removing his coat, greeted them. They gave an impatient shrug, made a face and went on up the steps. At the top of the steps, a Hispanic man opened the door for them. They gave an impatient shrug, made a face, and went on into the church. At that point, a voice-overlay was heard to say, ‘If you can't find God in them, it's not likely you'll find God in there.’”*

This is the story of Eucharist. New Testament writer, John Donahue, describes the word, justice, in scripture as *“making things right.”* Fr. Crosby applies that to the Eucharist - the Eucharist is about making things right. Scripture offers solid evidence for this understanding of Eucharist.

In ch. 14, Matthew says, *“If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother (sister) has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, be reconciled with your brother (sister), and then come and offer your gift.”*

All four gospels describe the feeding of the 4000. Jesus was moved to compassion when he saw the crowd which was hungry. So he had food distributed to them to eat. Jesus trying to make things right.

Paul in I Corinthians, chapter 11, says, “*When you assemble to celebrate the body and blood, you are not recognizing each other. The minute you come here, you cannot have discrimination among you. If anyone here is poor among you, if anyone is hungry among you, you are violating the body and blood of Christ.*” Paul was trying to make things right.

Gerald Darring of St. Louis University in 2007 wrote in the St. Louis University Liturgy Web-site: “*When the disciples came to Jesus with the request to dismiss the people to go find food, Jesus challenged them with the question: ‘Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?’ That question haunts us today.*”

- † More than enough food is grown to feed everyone on this planet, and people are still going hungry. This is not right. ‘*Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?*’
- † More than 60,000 people will die of hunger on this feast today of the Body and Blood of Christ. Two-thirds of them will be children. This is not right. ‘*Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?*’
- † Nearly one in five people worldwide is chronically malnourished— too hungry to lead a productive, active life. This is not right. ‘*Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?*’
- † One-third of the world’s children are significantly underweight for their age. This is not right. ‘*Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?*’
- † The amount of money the world spends on weapons in one minute could feed 2,000 malnourished children for a year. This is not right. ‘*Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?*’

The Second Vatican Council in 1965 says: ‘*If a person is in extreme necessity, he has the right to take from the riches of others what he himself needs.*’ The Eucharist is about making things right.

The Eucharist is about more than private devotion

It is true that the Eucharist is a wonderful private devotion, and yet it is more than that. It’s about our coming into Christ. As Fr. Crosby says, “*When the priest lifts the host and cup and says, ‘this is my body,’ everyone can look at each one there and say, ‘this is my body.’*” When we receive the Eucharist, we receive each other. That’s why Paul in I Corinthians can say, ‘*When you assemble to celebrate the body and blood, and if anyone is poor among you, if anyone is hungry among you - in Rockaway - Country - Church - you are violating the body and blood of Christ.*’”

It is easy to sidestep this with, *“The poor you will always have with you”* -- *“People are poor because they just made bad decisions”* -- *“It is not the government’s job to help the poor”* - *“Helping the poor is just a form of socialism.”* Such self-serving ideologies can never trump the Gospel. Indifference to the poor violates the Eucharist, even when they are the cause of their own poverty, which only leads to the violence we are facing today. Stop violence, by all means, but not by discarding the poor or acting out of revenge and hate. This is not Christian, no matter how many times we walk up the church aisle. The cross shows us that.

If this sounds harsh, it is. Life outside the body of Christ is harsh, brittle, bitter, fearful, and quarrelsome. To put it another way, making things right for the hungry, the homeless, the alien, and the criminal moves our lives from being harsh to pleasant, from brittle to soft, from bitter to gentle, from fearful to hopeful, from quarrelsome to forgiving, from alienated to loving. Being Eucharist to others is being Eucharist to ourselves. This feast is about us, so:

Happy Body and Blood of Christ Feast Day, everyone!