



Contributed by Father Tim Uniac, C.R.

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MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

June 18, 2017

GATHERING TIME

(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

My recollections about my First Communion have sadly faded some over the years. I recall it was an unusually hot and humid day, making the whole experience uncomfortable; I recall I had to wear a dress shirt and tie, and I was most certainly not the tie-wearing kind of boy; I recall having to stand on the steps of the church in the blazing sun to pose for a group picture, followed by family photos; and I recall kneeling at the Communion rail in anticipation of receiving Communion. But what I remember most of all was the excitement I was feeling as I was about to receive Communion for the very first time. To be honest it, was not excitement about the reception of Communion, but rather, now that I had received First Communion, I could now be a junior altar boy (my parents had encouraged this in the hopes that maybe as an altar boy I would pay attention more and be less disruptive during Mass – not sure if it proved to be true or not). In my mind, my First Communion was simply a stepping-stone along the way to what I *really* wanted: to be an altar boy. Not exactly, I suppose, the spiritual attitude I should have had on my First Communion day, and my teacher would no doubt have been horrified, but that was my experience. What do you recall about your First Communion?

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

We believe that the Eucharist is at the very heart of the Church, for it is there that we encounter Christ. This is why the Second Vatican Council proclaimed the Eucharist as the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* [Constitution on the Church] # 11). It is in the Eucharistic liturgy that the final fulfillment of the Kingdom of God is richly symbolized. The Eucharist unites us with the living Church on earth, and with those who have gone before us in death. It is in the Eucharist that we experience the greatest “taste” of all, the presence of God within us. Spend some time discussing how your experience of Eucharist does or does not relate to some of the things said above. Is Eucharist your greatest “taste” experience, explain? Are there any similarities between what we believe Eucharist can and should be, and a festive meal in our homes with family and friends?

The Table of the Word

THEME: The Real Presence of Christ

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, originally known as *Corpus Christi*, Latin for Body of Christ, was declared a universal solemnity in 1264 by Pope Urban IV. The reason for changing the name of this solemnity was due to the church's expanding understanding of Eucharistic theology. How so? If the primary purpose of this day is to focus our attention on the Eucharist as the real presence of Christ, then the real presence of Christ is found not just in the Body of Christ (*Corpus Christi*) but also in the Blood of Christ. Both elements of bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ. Eucharistic theology, however, does not stop there, on this day we are called to recognize the Church itself as the Body of Christ; the real presence of Christ is found in the Church. This Eucharistic theology is clearly present in today's reading from 1 Corinthians, where we are told the cup is the Blood of Christ, the bread is the Body of Christ, and the Church becomes one body when we partake.

Leader: The Lord our God satisfies our hunger with the gift of Eucharist; food that nourishes our spiritual life and strengthens us in our call to discipleship.

Lord Jesus, you are the spiritual food that leads to everlasting life, **Lord, have mercy.**
Christ Jesus, you are the manna sent down from heaven, **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, you make us all one as we share in the Eucharistic banquet, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray (together)

*O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament have left us a memorial of your Passion,
grant us, we pray, so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood
that we may always experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption.
Who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life-story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)*

FIRST READING (Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16)

Moses spoke to the people: "Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

“Do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.”

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

Brothers and sisters: The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the Blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the Body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (John 6:51-59)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus said to the people: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The people then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in them.

“Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Jesus said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred prayer through sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God's own Word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

Book of Deuteronomy: The Book of Deuteronomy contains the last speech and warnings by Moses to the people before they enter the Promised Land. Old Testament scripture scholar, Lawrence Boadt, tells us that the Book of Deuteronomy was written as a single speech by Moses, given on the banks of the river Jordan, just before the people crossed over (*Reading the Old Testament*, pg. 303-304). Today Moses is speaking about lessons learned in the forty years they wandered in the desert. Lesson one: God led the people

through the desert with many miraculous signs and wonders. Lesson two: God sustained the people during their desert wandering and promised to be present in their lives. In concrete terms, remember God delivered the people from slavery and gave them manna to eat. Moses hopes these words will be sufficient reason to keep God's commandments in the Promised Land.

1 Corinthians: The brevity of the second reading is no indication that the message is inconsequential; nothing could be further from the truth! It does, however, afford us the opportunity to get right to the basic message today. Paul is simply saying: we share in something truly special in the one bread and the one cup. Paul is inviting the people of Corinth to put aside their old pagan ways of life with the worship of idols, for they are now in a new relationship with Christ. There is no greater act of worship to partake in than the one bread and the one cup—the Eucharist. Even the offering of food to idols is nothing compared to the breaking of bread—there are absolutely no similarities between the two acts.

John: The Gospel today takes place shortly after the miracle of the loaves and fishes. This miraculous event resulted in crowds of people following Jesus (the very crowds we find in the passage for today). They were following Him perhaps looking for more signs, or maybe just looking for food to satisfy their hunger. Jesus proclaims to the crowd that He is the bread of life, the new manna offering eternal life. The miraculous food, the supernatural food, that sustained the Israelites in the desert is now found in the bread of life, the body and blood of Christ. This notion certainly troubles a great many in the crowd, concerned about eating flesh and drinking blood. For us, too, this can prove to be a difficult notion. But Jesus is clearly not advocating cannibalism, but rather, He is speaking about this incredibly rich and intimate connection we have with Him through His body and blood. This Eucharistic encounter with Christ is without doubt a miracle that can transform us and the Church. We become what Saint Paul said: “We who are many are one body.”

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16

“we do not live by bread alone”

- △ As the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years, there were moments of great difficulty and pain, and moments of pure joy and gladness. One of their difficulties was hunger, their bodies crying out for the nourishment and strength that comes from food. Their hunger was a test to see if they truly believed in the word of God. Their hunger humbled them as they recognized that God would indeed provide for them, the gift of manna from heaven. The manna was the fulfillment of God's promise, God's word, to the people of Israel.

Discuss how each time you receive Eucharist it serves as a reminder that God's promise, God's word, was fulfilled for us – God's gift of his only Son.

Does this evoke feelings of being humbled by God's gift?

Does this spiritual food satisfy your hunger?

Strengthened by this spiritual food, what are you now called to do in your spiritual life?

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

“we who are many are one body”

- ▲ Paul told the people of Corinth that by partaking in the Eucharistic banquet they all become one. There are no longer any divisions that separate: no language, no economic standing, no educational level, nothing: we are all one body in Christ! This “oneness” is also a global reality: we are one with people on the other side of the world, people of different cultures and languages – people we have never met are one with us in the Eucharistic banquet. We can travel almost anywhere in the world and become one with others as we partake in the Eucharist ... even if we do not understand the language being spoken in the Mass, we are still one.

What does this say to you about the power of Eucharist to unite total strangers?

Does this stir any feelings of hope that the Eucharist can transform the world, to bring peace to all God's creation?

What obligations does this gift of unity bestow upon us as people of faith?

John 6:51-59

“I am the living bread”

- ▲ Jesus no doubt stunned a number of people in the gospel today when he proclaimed himself as the living bread come down from heaven. If that was not enough, Jesus went even further when He said the living bread is His very flesh. We should not be surprised that after Jesus said this, the gospel says a dispute broke out amongst the people. To this very day Eucharistic theology can continue to cause disputes, even among people of faith.

How do you understand Jesus as the living bread?

What does it mean to you that this living bread, for the life of the world, is His flesh?

How do you understand that the reception of Eucharist promises eternal life and resurrection?

We abide in Christ, and He in us, through Eucharist: discuss.

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

Word of the Week:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in sections 1328-1331, addresses the question concerning what we are to call this Eucharistic relationship we have with Christ. In other words, when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, what is it called? The Catechism says, “Holy Communion, because by this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body.” Remember these words as this week you commune with Christ through the reception of Eucharist – look around in the Church at all those with whom you have just become one.

Suggestion for the Week:

The Second Vatican Council, in its document on the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), when speaking about the Mass, said: “The liturgy inspires the faithful to become 'of one heart in love' when they have tasted the fullness of the paschal mysteries; it prays that 'they may put into action in their lives what they have received in faith'” (SC, 10). Holy Communion gives us the grace to become 'of one heart in love', and further graces us with the ability to put into action that which we have received (grace) in faith. What have you received in faith? What action is your faith calling you to undertake? In Baptism this graced

relationship with God began, in Confirmation this graced relationship was further strengthened, and in Eucharist this graced relationship is nourished. What does this mean to you? Reflect upon how reception of Eucharist makes you one with all people of faith and calls you to live this reality in your life. What does this look like, concretely, in your life?

Intercessions: (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: Nourished and strengthened by God's word, we place our needs, and the needs of all the world, into the loving hands of God.

For the universal Church, where the real presence of Christ is made visible: may it be nourished, sustained and strengthened by the Word and Eucharist, we pray to the Lord ...

May all our religious leaders, especially our Holy Father, Pope Francis, be supported in their ministry by their reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, we pray to the Lord ...

For all those who hunger and thirst for God in their life: may they turn with courage to the Eucharist, and may it be for them the source of all they need in their life of faith, we pray to the Lord ...

In thanksgiving to God for the fulfillment of the Word, made visible in Jesus Christ, and for the fulfillment of the promise to feed our hunger with the true manna from heaven, we pray to the Lord ...

We pray in a special way this day for all fathers: may their faith give them the grace to extend their love and support to their families, so that in turn they will be loved, we pray to the Lord ...

For all who have died, may they joyfully enter their heavenly homeland, and feast at the banquet table of God's love, we pray to the Lord ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

Grant, O Lord, we pray, that we may delight for all eternity in that share of your divine life, which is foreshadowed in the present age by our reception of your precious Body and Blood. Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,

OUR FATHER ...

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The Scripture version used in this commentary is the [New Revised Standard Version](#) (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).