

Homily Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

Today's feast invites us to reaffirm our faith in the awesome gift God has given us in the Eucharist. When priests, deacons, or Eucharistic ministers offer us the bread or wine they say, "The Body of Christ" and "The Blood of Christ." Our response is "AMEN!" That little word carries a world of meaning. It is the Hebrew word that means "So be it!" It is our "Yes," our agreement that this is the Body and Blood of Christ. It also implies commitment. With that little word we profess our belief in Jesus Christ.

On this special solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, we will do what the Lord commanded, "Take and eat...take and drink." St. Cyril of Jerusalem, a fourth century bishop of Jerusalem, described the practice of receiving communion in the hand. Cyril wrote, "When you go to receive communion place your left hand as a throne for your right, which is to receive so great a King, and in the hollow of the palm receive the Body of Christ, saying, Amen."

When we take the host or drink from the cup, we enter a moment of intimacy with the one we call Lord, Savior, and friend. But our "Amen" goes beyond professing our faith in the presence of Christ. We pledge to befriend Him in the poor, the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned. We befriend Him in our families, neighbors, and friends. We commit ourselves to honor and serve Him. Knowing that, "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me."

In the Eucharist, we are poised between intimacy and awe in the presence of the Lord. This is as it should be. God is at once intimately and awesomely close to us. He is the Lord who brings all things into being and sustains them. He is the carpenter of Nazareth who welcomes us as friends. We acknowledge all of this with our "AMEN."

Our presence here is a privilege, not just a duty. The reality is expressed simply and profoundly by Jesus Himself. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body. Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins."

“This is my Body...This is My Blood,” We call it the Real Presence. This presence is something very special because it speaks of a distinct relationship with Jesus. He says, “My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” In the words of Pope Pius XII, “If you have received worthily, you are what you have received. You are Christ. You can expect to live the life of the earth-bound Jesus.”

As Catholics, the Bread of Life is not primarily an individualistic thing, a solitary supper, my private party...something between Jesus and me. The Bread of Life forms community. St. Paul phrased it beautifully: “Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

The Body of Christ that we take at the altar makes us the Body of Christ that is the Church. And as the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ’s love, in every Eucharist Jesus invites us to imitate His love... to love as He loves. As Jesus gave His life for us on the cross, and as He continues to give His life to us in the Eucharist, He is calling us to give our lives in the service of others.

He is calling us to feed people and comfort people, to heal and to liberate, to gather all men and women in the communion of love that is the Church. It is easy to see the unrest in our society today and in countries around the world. The world needs more love, more compassion. The world needs the Church and every one of us. It is very easy to get tangled in the web of theology when speaking about the Eucharist and I was concerned that I would fall into that trap today. I always pray as I prepare a homily and as I prayed about this homily, my thoughts were drawn to Blessed Carlo Acutis...soon to become Saint Carlo Acutis. At a very young age, Carlo was drawn to the Eucharist...drawn to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and this led him on a personal quest to learn about all the Eucharistic miracles throughout the world. The Eucharist was at the center of young Carlo’s life, and he thought that others would be drawn to Jesus if they truly understood the miracles that happened at every Mass. He researched Eucharistic miracles and over a span of two and a half years, he catalogued those 187 Eucharistic miracles and created a website for all to enjoy. A display of his work has traveled around the world, and we were gifted to have the display here at St. Benedict last September. Carlo was a regular teenager who liked to play video games and soccer...just an everyday kid enjoying life as kids do. He reminds us that we are all

called to be saints by living our ordinary lives with the extraordinary love of Christ at the center. At 15 years old, Carlo showed us that we can be more generous, more holy, and more Christ-like by spending time with Him at Mass, in the sacraments, and through prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. As a teenager, he cooperated with God's grace and embraced the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and cut through the depths of scholarly theology. He went right to the source...Jesus. Carlo placed himself at the table of the Last Supper and witnessed the institution of the Eucharist. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body. Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." That's it. That's it! When you hold the host in your hand and drink from the cup...it is Jesus. When you spend time at the Tabernacle, inside is Jesus. When you adore the exposed Blessed Sacrament, it is Jesus you are spending time with.

And so, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we celebrate this great solemnity of Corpus Christi today with new gratitude, with new appreciation for this great gift of God's love. Let us ask our Lord today, to never again allow us to take this Sacrament of his love for granted. Let us offer our lives on the altar along with Jesus' sacrifice, asking pardon for our sins, expressing gratitude for the blessings we have received, and presenting our needs and petitions. Let us be Christ-bearers. By receiving Holy Communion, we become Christ-bearers as Mary was. We become Tabernacles carrying the Living Word of God within us just as Mary carried the Living Word of God within her. Let us embrace the Words of Jesus to go out and make disciples of all nations... beginning in our homes and in our workplaces through love, mercy, forgiveness, and humble and sacrificial service. That is what it means to carry Jesus within us. That is what it means when we receive Him and say AMEN. Since it is Jesus Himself who said, "This is My Body...This is My Blood," who could dare to doubt that it truly is?