



HOMILY FOR THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST – YEAR C

“This is my body, which is given up for you.”

How many of us even pay attention when we hear those words, week in and week out? Are we really conscious of what we are hearing proclaimed to us not just by the priest who utters those words but also by Christ himself? Or have we become so desensitized to the meaning of the spoken word that those words—words which evoke the power of life and death—simply pass through one ear and out the other, as if they were meaningless? It is said that familiarity can breed contempt. And if that is not always true, then it is at least true that familiarity can cause us to take things for granted.

Today, on this Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Church reminds us that we cannot take these words for granted. Today the Church reminds us of the truth of the incarnation—that God became one of us in the person of Jesus, who lived among us, who died and rose again from the dead. But today the Church reminds us that Christ remains present with us—not just in spirit but in body—through his gift of the Eucharist—in his body broken for us and in his blood poured out for us. And it is through this very physical body and blood of Jesus, which we eat and drink under the signs of bread and wine, that we share in a significant, life changing way in the life of Christ, as we read in the words of the Prayer After Communion in today’s liturgy: “Grant, O Lord, we pray, that we may delight for all eternity in that share in your divine life, which is foreshadowed in the present age by our reception of your precious Body and Blood.” (*The Roman Missal*, 355.) The mystery of the Eucharist, then, is the mystery of our salvation. It is the mystery by which God feeds us with his very self so that we might live not only in this world, but also in the world that is yet to come.

But God reveals another mystery to us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist—a mystery which we often fail to recognize altogether—and that is the mystery of conjugal love—the mystery of the love between husband and wife. It seems strange, doesn’t it, be talking of marriage in the context of the Eucharist? And yet why did Jesus come into the world in the first place? In order that we might be one with him. St. Paul tells us, in quoting Genesis in his letter to the Ephesians: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church.” (Ephesians 5:31-32) Pope Saint John Paul II tells us that in the Eucharist, “We find ourselves at the very heart of the Paschal Mystery, which completely reveals the spousal love of God. Christ is the Bridegroom because ‘he has given himself’: his body has been ‘given’, his blood has been ‘poured out’ (cf. Lk 22:19-20). In this way ‘he loved them to the end’ (Jn 13:1). The ‘sincere gift’ contained in the Sacrifice of the Cross gives definitive prominence to the spousal meaning of God’s love.” (John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatis*, 26) In other words, Christ’s gift of himself on the Cross, a gift which he shares with us in the Eucharist, in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood, is a gift of love. He goes on to explain, “As the Redeemer of the world, Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride. The Eucharist makes present and realizes anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ, who ‘creates’ the Church, his body. Christ is united with this ‘body’ as the bridegroom with the bride.... The perennial ‘unity of the two’ that exists between man and woman from the very ‘beginning’ is introduced into this ‘great mystery’ of Christ and of the Church”. (John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatis*, 26)

So what does this mean for us, living in today’s world? What does it mean that we as the Church, are the bride of Christ, who offers his body and his blood to us that we might find life? What does it mean for us that “It is in the Eucharist that Christ fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear”? (Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained*, 25) It means that if we are created in the image and likeness of God, then we are called to do as Christ did for us. We are called to give of ourselves. It means that we find fulfillment, that we realize who we are called to be, not when we try to hold onto Christ for ourselves but rather when we are willing to give ourselves away, when we are willing to make a gift of ourselves as Christ has given himself as a gift to us. It means, as affirmed at the Second Vatican Council, “that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.” (*Gaudium et spes*, 22) We find our meaning in the person of Jesus, who shares his body and blood with us in the Eucharist. And as Christ has revealed himself and given himself to us, so we must give of ourselves to others, allowing our bodies to be broken and our blood poured out for the life of the world around us, until that time when we take our places at the banquet of God’s children in heaven, where we will find our definitive fulfillment as men and women, (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 66:2) as sons and daughters to our God who has created us in his own image and likeness and who calls us back to himself.



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