

## Corpus Christi, 2017

Perhaps the greatest gift that Jesus left behind to his fledgling Church-- apart from the example of his own teaching, his life and death--was the Eucharist. With justification, the Eucharist is often spoken of as the very center of Catholic lives. There is a very real danger for Catholic communities of collapsing or degenerating when deprived of the Eucharist for any length of time. No one can in effect remain a committed Catholic without participation in the Eucharist.

Every persecuted Church realizes this and struggles to keep the Eucharist alive in its communities. We have seen this in countless examples over the centuries including our own. We have seen how Catholics in China went to enormous lengths to celebrate the Eucharist in spite of appalling difficulties.

In Ireland, people will point out lonely outcrops known as "Mass rocks" in remote parts of the country where persecuted Catholics secretly celebrated the Eucharist at the risk of death. In England, you will be shown the hiding places for priests on the run who went from house to house in order to provide the Eucharist for Catholics who risked martyrdom if they were discovered celebrating the "Popish Mass."

It is sad, then, to find in our persecution-free societies today how many have lost this sense of the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian living. However, it is not altogether their fault. The Church itself must take some of the blame.

What do we do at the Eucharist? Basically, we do two things:

- a. We remember and we give thanks. The word "Eucharist" is derived from a Greek word for "thanks". Above all, we remember with deep gratitude all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ, through his life,

suffering, death and resurrection. We also remember and give thanks for all our own personal experiences of God's love at work in our own lives. It is time to count our blessings. And we remember and give thanks not only for what happened a long time ago, but most especially for what is happening at this time in our lives.

b. We come together to celebrate our being a community and a fellowship in Christ. The Mass by itself, does not make community. It is the celebration of a community already existing. For, although the Eucharist is the center of our Catholic life, it is not the totality of that life. It cannot survive in a vacuum. The Eucharist is a sacrament or sign of something which is bigger than itself—that is, a living Catholic community. That is why the Eucharist is, by and large, the measure of a Catholic community. From the way a congregation celebrates its Eucharist one can know immediately whether this is a living or a dying or a dead community. And dead or non-existent community cannot have a living Eucharist.

Today is the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. Whose Body? And whose Blood? Is it the body that died on the cross? The Body that walked and talked and taught in Galilee? Not really. The Body that we celebrate today is the Body of the Risen Jesus. All of us who are baptized are members and are constituent parts of that Body. Some of those members are alive and healthy and contributing to the overall life of the Body. Others are sick or dropping off, others are in need of healing or nourishment...

When we approach the altar to receive Communion, the priest or minister says, "The Body of Christ." When we say or sing our Amen of assent in faith, we need to be aware that the Body we are receiving is that Risen Body of Jesus, of which each one present is a part. To that end, we may even say that we are, in fact, eating each other! If that

sounds shocking, then it is not surprising that the Jews, including some of Jesus' own disciples were shocked, when he told them to eat his body and drink his blood.

For we do not just "receive" the Body of Christ. It would be better to say that we share it. Paul emphasizes this in today's second reading: as he says: The blessing-cup that we bless is a communion which the blood of Christ and the bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ." "Body" here means the whole Body of the Risen Christ—Jesus and the community of followers. He continues by saying that the one loaf which is broken and distributed is a sign that "though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf". It is unfortunate that nowadays the sense of sharing the one loaf has been lost by the small unbread-like discs that are now normally use for our Communion hosts.

Communion is not just with Jesus, but also with all those around us. That is why, before this Communion we need to say the Lord's Prayer in which we ask forgiveness of those we have offended. The Sign of Peace gives an opportunity for genuine reconciliation so that the unity expressed through Communion may be genuine. Have we not seen people deliberately avoid each other at the Sign of Peace and then piously approach the altar? They have forgotten the instructions of Jesus to stay away from the altar until we have reconciled with our brother or sister.

Of course, it is difficult to have a sense of sharing in the one loaf as the sacrament of one Body, if, in fact, we are not one body. And we are not one body if, outside the church building, we are not united and caring for each other. One gets the impression that many come to Mass as a purely personal act. They come in and out as self-contained individuals. Some come late and leave early apparently with no sense whatever

that this could be construed as a lack of respect for the celebrating community. I have to make one exception and that is that this does not necessarily apply to parents with small, unpredictable children.

If we are not already a community before we enter the place where the Eucharist is being celebrated, we are not suddenly going to become a community after we come in. A parish where Mass-going is basically the only activity of its members is going to be a dead parish and its Eucharist will also be dead(repeat) . As was said above, the Eucharist is the measure of the life of the parish. And a parish gets the Eucharist that it deserves. Poor community, poor Eucharist. A vibrant Christian community cannot have a dead Eucharist.

There is a story of a parish where the people complained that it had died, so the pastor organized a final requiem Mass with a coffin in front of the altar. At the end of the Mass, the people were invited to file past the open coffin. When they looked in, they saw each an image of themselves in a large mirror placed at the bottom of the coffin. Yes, if our parish is dead, if our Eucharists are boring we should realize that everyone is partially responsible. So, before we give up going to Sunday Eucharist, we might ask to what extent are we responsible for the situation we complain about.

Here I would like to interrupt this treatise on the Eucharist with a special Father's day greeting. My Father wasn't particularly present in my life and so I missed out on him being a role model and that's not what I want for the children of this parish. And so I say to you Fathers, the Mass isn't just for women and children; you are a family, and what is a more important family event than receiving the Body and Blood together? It means a lot to your wife and especially to your children that you be present. May I go even further and say that your example

is critical. I am simply asking you Fathers to be present in all the significant events in your family's lives

My second commercial is for the men of the parish to take a serious look at the ACTS retreat that will happen downtown next weekend. How important is it? Well, 20 men from St. Elizabeth parish in San Antonio, Texas, will either fly out at their own expense or drive out, using valuable vacation time, in order to minister to the men of this community. Sadly, only a few have signed up, but there is plenty of information in the Gathering Space. Msgr. Moore will be the chaplain since I will be celebrating my cousins' wedding in Lafayette, Louisiana, at the same time. Last year, we had 20 men experience this retreat and they were very happy with it. Some said that it changed their lives. Please, consider this a wonderful opportunity for Catholic male bonding with a focus on Jesus Christ. Monday is the deadline.

Now, the commercials are over. It must be that our celebration of the Eucharist is not simply a commemoration of what happened to the historical Jesus 2000 years ago. It is—in a spirit of remembrance and thanksgiving—a celebration of what makes us what we are today.

We need to celebrate as a people who become daily more and more aware that we are constituent parts of the body of Christ. If people are to know Christ, it can only be through us, his Risen Body, which we are.