

## Communion as One Body through His Blood

**Corpus Christi: The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ** – Cycle A – June 14, 2020  
Deut 8:2-3, 14b-16a; 1 Cor 10:16-17; Jn 6:51-58.

*“The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh”* (Jn 6:51)

Prologue: Body and Blood are two biblical symbols with many First Testament significances; which Jesus gives new meaning to in the Gospels with his life, death and resurrection. Today, in a world united in suffering and pain in the Covid-19 context, we can strive to derive new meaning from the Eucharist which, today, can only be followed online by most of the lay faithful.

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. *Body:* of the first ‘man’ (*Adam*, Hebrew) is created by God out of the dust of the ground (*Adamah*, Hebrew) says the Book of Genesis (2:7); yet, human beings are created in the “image and likeness of God” (1:26-27). But, “for the man there was not found a helper as his partner” (2:20). Thus, God creates woman who Adam finally rejoices in with poetry: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ... for out of man this one was taken” (2:23). These two human beings have the potentiality to become “one flesh” or one body in marriage (2:24), giving birth to human community in their fruitfulness and multiplication (1:28). In the First Testament, great regard is given both, to the human body and to the forming of community in relationship with God through the ‘covenant’. In the first reading from Deuteronomy (chapter 8), Moses reminds his people of God’s providential care and covenantal protection—how God was forming them into a body by feeding them with manna: heavenly gifted bread! This miraculous, unprecedented feeding them “with manna that your ancestors did not know” (8:16a) was never to be forgotten but was to be commemorated and celebrated in the Passover festivities. The feeding with manna and the Mosaic Covenant form the background for Jesus to reinterpret his life in these terms, which were very much alive in Jewish imagination.
2. *Blood:* is an ambiguous symbol in the Bible. While blood is natural, its sight is not—since the shedding of blood is associated with violence, murder, guilt and wrongdoing. Blood is connected to both, human life and human death. Without blood humans return to dust because life is in the blood (Lev 17:11,14). “Blood and water” signify life (Jn 19:34; 1 Jn 5:6) and the pair “flesh and blood” stands for humans and humanity (Jn 1:13; 1 Cor 15:50). Innocent blood shed cries out to God for justice and vengeance (Gen 4:10; Job 16:18) and often marks death by violence (Ezek 5:17; Hab 2:17). Only in the context of sacrifices offered to God does blood attain value. Here too it is ritualized and treated with respect since the blood of animals had to be shed in a specific way and not randomly. For instance, for the ratification of the Mosaic covenant, animals were sacrificed and their blood sprinkled (Ex 24:3-8). Note that in the Jewish tradition drinking of blood was forbidden, for it stood for life sacred to God (Gen 9:4; Lev 7:26); but, there also existed the expiatory sense (Lev 17:10-14) by which the community will understand that Jesus’ sacrifice brought them life through sacramental communion. Here, once again, in the light of the First Testament, Jesus’ “flesh and blood” given and the “new covenant” initiated will find deep meaning.

3. *Flesh and Blood*: The gospel according to John has no account of the institution of the Eucharist but includes instead: [a] Jesus' prophetic symbolic action of the washing of his disciples' feet (13:1-15), and, [b] Jesus' long bread discourse in the context of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (6:1-15). Like their ancestors being reminded about the feeding with manna and the covenant, Jesus prophesies that his disciples will be fed with something more personal, potent and permanent than food which perishes: Himself! He, the 'Bread of Life' will be there to sustain, sanctify and strengthen. "Flesh and blood" implies the whole person and "eating and drinking" signifies communion. Thus, just as a child eats and is nourished by what its parents provide, so does Jesus promise his disciples that they will receive new life from his "flesh and blood"—his very self—by giving them a parallelism of parental providence: "Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me" (v.57). Far from being a form of cannibalism, Jesus speaks of a new covenant that will be cemented with a new communion: in the breaking of his body and shedding of his blood.

### **Linking the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading with Eucharistic Eating, Union and Communion**

The short reading focuses on one aspect of the Eucharist: communion. Paul warns the well-to-do Corinthians about their former pagan and idolatrous practices, which are harmful not only to themselves but to the community. He criticizes their temple banquets which were dangerous since they often led to excesses of every kind. Instead, he reminds them of the Christic and Eucharistic "bread" and "cup of blessing" which bind them into a spiritual union 'with'—a 'com' + 'union'—with Christ and with one another. The assembly of Christians who come together form one 'Body' which he will talk about later in chapter 12. Paul mentions 'cup' *before* 'bread' probably promoting a tradition—like that of the gospel of Luke—that stressed Jesus' sacrifice as the 'new covenant'. Once again one notices connections between bread, body, cup and covenant.

**Three Contextual Concerns for *Corpus Christi*:** We speak of the consecration of the bread and the wine as the '*transubstantiation*' of the elements into the body and blood of Christ. However, we must not forget the calls and challenges of Eucharistic communion.

*The Body Concern:* The Church is the 'Body of Christ' in history. It can never exist for itself—seeking power and self-preservation; rather, it truly becomes the Body of Christ in its mission of self-emptying out of love and service to other bodies: of the poor, of the sick, of fellow citizens, and of Mother Nature. Church is always a catalyst of holy communion, seeking to unify and build more inclusive bodies and communities, worldwide.

*The Bread Concern:* Gandhiji once said, "If God were to come into this world, God would come as bread." Jesus *is* the Bread of Life. He comes to satisfy all our hungers: spiritual, moral, physical, social, psychological, emotional, etc. Any dichotomy between the temporal and spiritual, secular and sacred, body and spirit, etc., is not Christian. Hence, much as we are nourished by the Bread of Life, we are called to feed bread and *be bread* to millions of our brethren who do not have bread to eat. This is so true in the Covid-19 context.

*The Blood Concern:* The shedding of blood is to be strongly condemned except in the context of the giving of one's blood for a greater cause. Here, altruistic activities like blood donation and martyrdom assume meaning. We are truly 'blood' brothers and sisters in Christ.

Pope Francis says: "*The Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love*" [*Laudato Si'*, n. 236]