

## The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord: The Covenant of Eucharist

Today's first reading presents a significant scene from the *Book of Exodus*. This is the people's acceptance the Covenant of the Law of God, the Covenant of the Ten Commandments. A sacrifice was used to seal the covenant. Young bulls were slain. As a sign of the people's acceptance, all the people were sprinkled with the blood of the bulls, the blood of the sacrifice. Strange, but significant. The people were not to be mere observers. They were to be intimately involved in the covenant.

This reading is presented as prophetic foreshadowing of the Blood of the New Covenant. We share intimately in the sacrifice offered to the Father by Jesus on the Cross. Instead of witnessing a sacrifice, we receive the sacrifice within ourselves. We eat His Body. Instead of being sprinkled with the Blood of the Sacrifice, we drink the Blood of the Lord.

When we receive communion we reaffirm our acceptance of the New Covenant with God. This is more than just saying, "I agree." Communion is an intimate sharing of the presence of Christ conquering evil on the Cross. We are not just stained with blood. We take the blood of the Lamb within us. We don't just offer young bulls for sacrifice. We take the sacrifice within us. The sacrifice is the Body of Christ.

As little children we learned that communion was Jesus. But after the excitement of First Holy Communion, it was easy for us to forget what we were doing or whom we were receiving when we approached the Eucharist. Our parents had to remind us continually to talk to Jesus, to pray.

The Church gives us the Solemnity of Corpus Christi to remind us of as adults of what we are doing and whom we are receiving which we approach the Eucharist. The original celebration of the Body of Christ was begun in the thirteenth century and promoted by one of our spiritual ancestors named St. Juliana of Liege, a visionary and an Augustinian nun. Soon after this the pope, Pope Urban IV, asked the great theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, to prepare a Mass to celebrate this new feast. We still sing some of the hymns that St. Thomas Aquinas wrote for this Mass, particularly the *Tantum Ergo*, or *Down in Adoration Falling*, and the *O Salutaris Hostia*, or *O Saving Victim*. In the past the Eucharist was honored on Corpus Christi with processions. The priest would carry the Blessed Sacrament through the city, stopping several times for Benediction. This custom is still encouraged and practiced in many countries throughout the world.

Most often we refer to the Eucharist as "communion". The communal aspect of the Eucharist is far more than a group of people sharing a meal. It is the union of those who share the Body of Christ into the Kingdom of God. When we receive communion we are by that very action recommitting ourselves to fighting paganism in our lives and our world. We are recommitting ourselves to be active members of that community that spreads the Kingdom of God through sacrificial love. Because we receive the Eucharist so often, it is easy to overlook the huge commitment we are making to live and spread the Kingdom of God.

The Eucharist, a word that means thanksgiving, is the way that we thank God for life we have received. We thank God for uniting us to the community of salvation. We thank God for the many ways that we experience his love in every aspect of our lives.

The Eucharist is the mystery of commitment and strength. The commitment is to do the work of the Kingdom. We are a part of the Grand Adventure, the Great Quest. When we receive communion we reaffirm our role in the battle to transform the world into the Kingdom of God.

The Eucharist is also the mystery of strength. The strength that we need for the Great Quest is the very presence of Jesus within us as Church and as individuals. We are not in this battle alone. We carry the Lord, our strength. Do we have a difficult decision to make? We ask Jesus within us for guidance after we receive. Do we feel that our lives are falling apart? We ask Jesus to keep us together. Are we searching for a way to serve the Lord? We give ourselves over to the Lord within us. Are we sick, gravely sick, even terminal? We ask Jesus within us how we can use our sickness to fulfill our part of the Grand Adventure. Do we feel alone? We stop and pray after communion and realize that we are never alone when we are with the Lord.

There are so many reasons why we pray when we have Jesus within us after we receive communion. All of them are valid. Every petition is heard by the Lord, particularly when he is within us.

Today we pray for sincerity. We pray that we might be sincere in the commitment we make every time we receive communion.