

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ Year A

Celebration Summary by Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD: The Lectionary today includes a non-scriptural passage, the sequence, which comes from the pen of the great theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas. The readings of the celebration deal with bread and wine (and fish in the Gospel) as signs of God's covenant and as signs to invoke the remembrance of God. The sequence comes as a meditation on these same aspects and more as found in the Eucharist: sacrifice, memorial, Communion, salvation, all in Christ. The Gospel reading brings the bread of life discourse from chapter 6 of John's Gospel to us, to remember again the deep reality that comes to us in Communion, as well as the scandal and the difficulty that this assertion brought to the people in the time of Jesus. It is not obvious to see Christ truly present in the Eucharist, but for the eyes of faith it is essential. This brings the message of the sequence back before us.

The second reading brings us the other crucial dimension of the Eucharist. As much as it is Christ coming to us in the Blessed Sacrament, so too it is the means that binds us together as a single body in Christ.

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First Reading: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a

He gave you a food unknown to you and your fathers.

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy

Moses said to the people:

"Remember how for forty years now the LORD, your God,
has directed all your journeying in the desert,
so as to test you by affliction
and find out whether or not it was your intention

to keep his commandments.
He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger,
and then fed you with manna,
a food unknown to you and your fathers,
in order to show you that not by bread alone does one
live,
but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the
LORD.

"Do not forget the LORD, your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
that place of slavery;
who guided you through the vast and terrible desert
with its saraph serpents and scorpions,
its parched and waterless ground;
who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock
and fed you in the desert with manna,
a food unknown to your fathers."

The word of the Lord

Commentary Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a by Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB: Deuteronomy is mostly about remembering the past deeds God has done for Israel. That certainly sets the context for this present passage (Dt 2). Engaging in such remembering was also understood as "making present." It was not an exercise in mere nostalgia. Doing so was characteristic of Israel during the exilic period. Certain themes emerge as important in this remembering. Clearly God has consistently provided divine guidance and providence for the community during its sojourn in the wilderness. This wilderness experience itself was aimed at being both humbling and testing for the Israelites. No one passes from bondage into freedom without the purifying experience of wilderness.

Within the context of the dangers of the wilderness experience God miraculously fed the Israelites with manna

(Ex 16; Num 11:16-23). Here Deuteronomy develops this memory in a homiletic fashion which emphasizes strongly the necessity of living by the word of God (Dt 8:3). This is a verse that will be quoted by Jesus in the temptation stories found in Matthew and Luke. The entire experience is the subject matter for Jesus' "Bread from Heaven" discourse in John 6.

A strong warning is given to the Israelites not to forget what God has done for them throughout their history (Dt 8:14-16). If in fact they do forget they risk being cut off from the divine presence which can be made real through the power of memory. Without this presence there will be no divine guidance and providence. The people will be left to their own devices and their history shows just how disastrous that can be.

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Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20

✠(12) Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.

Or:

✠Alleluia.

Glorify the LORD, O Jerusalem;
praise your God, O Zion.

For he has strengthened the bars of your gates;
he has blessed your children within you.

He has granted peace in your borders;
with the best of wheat he fills you.

He sends forth his command to the earth;
swiftly runs his word!

He has proclaimed his word to Jacob,
his statutes and his ordinances to Israel.
He has not done thus for any other nation;

his ordinances he has not made known to them. Alleluia.

Commentary Psalm 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20 by Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB: Psalm 147 in its entirety is a hymn of praise whose content is the Lord. As one prominent commentator puts it, "The Lord is so much the content of praise that praise begins to reflect his attributes." The portion of this psalm used as a response in the liturgy focuses on the exercise of God's sovereignty. The way God exercises this sovereignty is through the word. So powerful is this image of the word that it can be understood as a personification of God, an understanding fully embraced by the New Testament.

The first section of this responsorial psalm (Ps 147:12-15) praises God for all the security and well being that God provides for the people. This psalm reflects the Jerusalem community as it undertook the difficult task of restoration following the exile. Protection, blessing, and peace would have been extremely important for a people who had suffered the terrible experience of total defeat and exile. God provides all of this through the agency of God's word. A similar understanding run throughout the prophet Isaiah 40-55.

The second section of this responsorial psalm (Ps 147:19-20) uses the "word" as a metaphor for God's statutes and ordinances. This is the law which God has given to Israel as a gift. It is the gift of election and identity. This sacred Torah was revered by Israel as the highest form of God's word communicated to humans. This understanding is clearly reflected in the first reading of the liturgy (Dt 8:2-3). It is taken even further in the Gospel (Jn 6:51-58) where we see the Word of God, Jesus, feeding the people with his very self.

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

The bread is one, and we, though many, are one body.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?

The bread that we break,
is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

Because the loaf of bread is one,
we, though many, are one body,
for we all partake of the one loaf.

The word of the Lord

Commentary 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 by [John Paul Heil](#):

Main Theme: The eucharistic cup and bread transform us into the one body of Christ.

On this solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ Saint Paul reminds us that by drinking "the cup of blessing," that is, the cup of wine that we bless at the Eucharist so that it is transformed into the blood of Christ, we sacramentally participate in the sacrificial death of Christ symbolized by that blood. And by eating "the bread that we break," that is, the eucharistic bread that has been transformed into the body of Christ, we sacramentally participate in the sacrificial death of Christ symbolized by that body. A sacrificial death involves the separation of the victim's body, the flesh, from the animating principle that gives the body life, the blood. Body and blood are the essential elements of the sacrificial death. By partaking separately of both the blood and body of Christ we participate fully in his sacrificial death.

Furthermore, by partaking of the one loaf of bread, the eucharistic body of Christ, we, as many and diversified as we may be, are transformed into the one communal "body" of Christ. By partaking of the eucharistic wine and bread we not only participate in the sacrificial blood and body of Christ, but are united into the communal body of Christ. The one eucharistic body of Christ transforms us into the one communal body of Christ, the Church.

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Sequence Lauda Sion

Laud, O Zion, your salvation,
Laud with hymns of exultation,
Christ, your king and shepherd true:

Bring him all the praise you know,
He is more than you bestow.
Never can you reach his due.

Special theme for glad thanksgiving
Is the quick'ning and the living
Bread today before you set:

From his hands of old partaken,
As we know, by faith unshaken,
Where the Twelve at supper met.

Full and clear ring out your chanting,
Joy nor sweetest grace be wanting,
From your heart let praises burst:

For today the feast is holden,
When the institution olden
Of that supper was rehearsed.

Here the new law's new oblation,
By the new king's revelation,
Ends the form of ancient rite:

Now the new the old effaces,
Truth away the shadow chases,
Light dispels the gloom of night.

What he did at supper seated,
Christ ordained to be repeated,
His memorial ne'er to cease:

And his rule for guidance taking,
Bread and wine we hallow, making
Thus our sacrifice of peace.

This the truth each Christian learns,
Bread into his flesh he turns,
To his precious blood the wine:

Sight has fail'd, nor thought conceives,
But a dauntless faith believes,
Resting on a pow'r divine.

Here beneath these signs are hidden
Priceless things to sense forbidden;
Signs, not things are all we see:

Blood is poured and flesh is broken,
Yet in either wondrous token
Christ entire we know to be.

Whoso of this food partakes,
Does not rend the Lord nor breaks;
Christ is whole to all that taste:

Thousands are, as one, receivers,
One, as thousands of believers,

Eats of him who cannot waste.

Bad and good the feast are sharing,
Of what divers dooms preparing,
 Endless death, or endless life.

Life to these, to those damnation,
See how like participation
 Is with unlike issues rife.

When the sacrament is broken,
Doubt not, but believe 'tis spoken,
 That each sever'd outward token
 doth the very whole contain.

Nought the precious gift divides,
Breaking but the sign betides
 Jesus still the same abides,
 still unbroken does remain.

Gospel Acclamation John 6:51

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven, says the Lord;
whoever eats this bread will live forever.

Gospel John 6:51-58

My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to the Jewish crowds:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven;
whoever eats this bread will live forever;
and the bread that I will give
is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying,

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them,

"Amen, amen, I say to you,
unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his
blood,

you do not have life within you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood

has eternal life,

and I will raise him on the last day.

For my flesh is true food,

and my blood is true drink.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood

remains in me and I in him.

Just as the living Father sent me

and I have life because of the Father,

so also the one who feeds on me

will have life because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven.

Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died,

whoever eats this bread will live forever."

The Gospel of the Lord

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

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Commentary John 6:51-58 by [Fr. Damien Dougherty, O.F.M.](#): The theme of eating the Eucharist is linked to that of faith in Jesus, the spiritual manna of the eschatological times and the incarnate divine Wisdom. By utilizing, ever-so-subtly, allusions to Wisdom Literature within the discourse, John is bringing to mind that the faith of the disciples is, above all, a personal orientation and there is a continuity between our adhesion to the Christ through faith and participation in the Eucharistic banquet.

Within this Wisdom context John can better explain the link between the Eucharist and the Incarnation as the mystery of the living bread is but an aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation. It is no mere coincidence that John employs the term "flesh" for both the Eucharist as well as the Incarnation: the Bread of Life that makes us live is nothing other than the Word-made-flesh. The same faith that is required for the Incarnation is also demanded for the Eucharist.

Only the exaltation of the Christ on the cross will reveal his supernatural being and by that very same fact the exaltation will realize the mystery of the Bread of Life. If the bread promised by Jesus will give life forever, it is because the Son of Man is given by the Father and descends from heaven to give us that very same life. By his glorification he enters into possession of the fullness of the Spirit to such an extent that his body becomes, by means of the Eucharist, food for the life of the world.