

FIRST READING: Genesis: 14:18-20

A reading from the Book of Genesis:

In those days, Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.
The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 110:1, 2, 3, 4

You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

The LORD said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool."

You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

The scepter of your power the LORD will stretch forth from Zion: "Rule in the midst of your enemies."

You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

"Yours is princely power in the day of your birth, in holy splendor; before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you."

You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

The LORD has sworn, and he will not repent: "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

SECOND READING: Corinthians 11:23-26

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

Brothers and sisters: I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 9:11b-17

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured. As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, "Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here." He said to them, "Give them some food yourselves." They replied, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people." Now the men there numbered about five thousand. Then he said

to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty." They did so and made them all sit down. Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Corpus Christi (*The Body and Blood of Christ*)

To us Catholics we begin this feast from the wrong end. We begin with the Eucharist, which we receive in Communion; the host as Christ's body and the cup that contains his blood. We reserve the Eucharist in a tabernacle which is under lock and key. A perpetually lit candle indicates that Jesus is home. This is the wrong place to begin. We need to look first at the sources of its mystery; Jesus and then the Church.

We begin with Jesus himself; God born of a woman and in the flesh, suckled with his mother's milk. He had a body that made God human; someone just like us but never sinned. He learned to walk, talk, read and write just as we did. He laughed and cried, became frustrated and angry and at times came close to despair. He cried over the people of Jerusalem who never came to faith. He sweat bullets as he prayed to his Abba for some respite as he dreaded his suffering and death. He cared for his friends and family and mourned when loved ones died. In this man we can see ourselves; and that's the point. God knows exactly what we go through; because, in Jesus, God did too.

Jesus also had titles we use to avoid saying his name; God's preexisting and everlasting Word. Jesus was the word God spoke as God said, "Let there be light." All creation, the cosmos and all life were the result. Messiah and God's anointed we call the Christ. This is a title and not his name. His parents named him, when he was born, Jeshua in Aramaic. We have seen too much iconography. Jesus had no halo and looked no different than any one else. Those early believers had no indication that Jesus was also God. Their faith was God's gift to them as it is to us. We've never met, seen or heard him as they did. Through generations and millennia, we believe because of their witness.

We begin with a living Jesus who, as a human being, was like us, in all but sin. Sin is the segue into why Jesus was born. As humans we all have flaws and weakness. We can only do what's right and good with God's grace. We can choose the good in a limited way without God's grace but without it we will inevitably sin. This is the reason Jesus, God's son, became flesh and was born. He became like us to save us from ourselves and to reveal God's infinite, eternal and unconditional love. God is love and desires our collective and personal salvation. God saves the human race one person at a time.

Jesus sacrificed his life for ours as a ransom. He took on our sins, pain and weakness and died in our place. He, though innocent, died the death of a criminal as the outward sign of God's love. This is one of the ancient Hebrew roots of our Christian faith; the notion of a sacrifice for sins. We've heard of offerings, sacrifices of food to God, produce of the land, first born of the flock and offerings of bread and wine. When offered to God, they were roasted and not burnt. They fed the priests, servants and those who staffed the temple in Jerusalem.

God's a spirit and has no need for food. God relished in the smells of the cooking, the smoke would waft like our neighbor's barbeque and delighting neighbors as well as God. At the time of

feast and festivals, the offerings the faithful, offered, collected and then cooked, would feed all the faithful who brought these gifts. In this way, God provided food for the feast. God also relished those who gathered; they were God's children. They offered the food to God who then fed God's family in return.

Jesus died on the cross. His fidelity to God's plan ensured that we would live to eternal life. For us to receive this gift, all we need is faith; faith in God and in Jesus. Faith is God's gift. To choose faith is also God's gift. Jesus rose from death as a sign of what Jesus won; triumph for us over sin and death. How do we know that we have the gift of eternal life? If we can love others and do good in Jesus' name. We give witness to the gift of salvation by loving ourselves, each other and our enemies too. In our witness we love God back. First, God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to be our savior so that all who believe may share eternal life.

This was the first element of this feast of Jesus' body and blood. When Jesus returned to the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Pentecost is the birthday of Jesus' Church. Frightened, bereft people picked up Jesus's mission, not to die but live; to tell the whole world that God is love. God's love will save sinners through faith. God's love will forgive our sins. Jesus promised never to leave us and he never has. Forgiveness is just a thought away. Thoughts of God are prayer and God's gifts to those who pray them.

The Spirit made sure that the faith of Jesus made it to us and our world. Jesus told us that when people gather in his name, he is in their midst. We gather at mass and in our homes with our families. "In his name" is never confined to a place. It's in the context of people gathering. All people need to do is think of Jesus and he is there with them. Sometimes we forget Jesus' words. It's the Spirit who helps us to remember. Where there are people, often there is God. There are some who seek to limit God, who is infinite, eternal and unconditional. What they do is limit their experience. The people of God can know Jesus with at least two being there – that was his promise to us.

Often, I refer to the Church as the people of God. I can also call the Church the Mystical Body of Jesus. Jesus now lives through, within and among us now. In a real sense, as the Church, we are Jesus' Body and Blood, the living stones that build Christ's Church and bring him into the world. This is our identity as the Church. We are faithful to God and one another. From our identity we share Christ's mission. These are the words Jesus spoke to the Eleven that ended the gospel of Matthew, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." This is a mission and a promise. The Spirit ensures that we have all we need in Jesus' promise to carry out the Church's mission until Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom.

At mass, we offer bread and wine that will become Jesus' body and blood. The Eucharist is a sacrament in which we partake and receive. Bread and wine are food. This food becomes Jesus which we, in turn eat. We call an offering a sacrifice. The sacrifice, in ancient Judaism, is offered to God who then offers it back to God's people. That's the same pattern for us. With our offerings God feeds us. Now I know that a single unconsecrated host can taste like cardboard and has little nourishment. The wine we use is never vintage. But at mass they become much more. They become Jesus' body and blood and unite us in Christ in the action of sharing and eating. We know him as we break bread.

The Eucharist is the sacrament of Jesus' body and blood. For those of us of a certain age, if I were to ask this question, "What is a sacrament?" I have a rote answer, memorized from the

Baltimore Catechism. "A sacrament is an outward sign, instituted by Christ to give us grace." I could rattle that one off from the age of six or seven and is one of the few that I can still remember. It took me into my twenties to come to know its meaning. What is a sign? A street sign gives location; Montrose and Ozanum. A church's sign tells the identity; Divine Savior. A stop sign tells us to make an action; stop to prevent harm. What is outward? Say you see me smiling. It can indicate that I'm happy, you may not know why. As I smile, I reveal an inner emotion as indicated with a grin. This is just like seeing someone wearing a wedding band. We can know that someone has or had a lover and spouse without them saying a word.

The signs we use in the Sacraments can have meaning in and of themselves. Let me use two. Water is the sign used in baptism. We all need water to live; without it we'll die. But in too much water we will drown. Water is the sign of life and death. In baptism we die to sin and rise with the life of Jesus. No one can see that, but we do see the pouring of water for babies and immersion for those older. Anyone who has ever had someone hold them under water knows how the first new breath feels. A gasp of safety!

Another is wine. Many enjoy wine with a meal or at the end of the work day. I've used it in cooking. The fermentation of grapes was at first a natural occurrence but now is raised to an art. Wine is a human staple enhancing life and dining. I point out that it's also an intoxicant; too much makes one drunk. Just why did Jesus choose a cup of wine to become his blood? Could his presence intoxicate us? Wine is also called a spirit. What can life in the Spirit be like?

Now when we gather together in Jesus' name how do we know he is there? We don't see him, hear him or touch him. It's his Spirit that we believe is there. We see each other and in others we can know Jesus. We can feel Jesus' presence and trust his promise. But like the TV ads for pots and pans, "Wait there's more!" We can know Jesus in the sharing and breaking of bread. When we share a meal with another person, if we remember Jesus, we recognize him. At mass bread and wine become Jesus' Body and Blood. This we break and share together as food for our souls.

We cannot see or hear Jesus but we can see, taste and eat Communion. It binds us as believers with Jesus' body and blood. We receive the Eucharist as an outward, public sign as food for our journey to the kingdom of God. It reveals the inward reality of Jesus' life within us and our Church. It proclaims, publically, that we are Catholic. We carry Jesus within our bodies and as we leave mass, he goes with us as we give witness to faith in the waiting world. There's one last thought about Jesus giving his flesh as food. Nursing mothers produce the milk that feeds their babies. Mothers have flesh that feeds too. Nourishment can be a real image for us of how Jesus loves and cares for us, too. We are nourished by his body and blood; we are sustained through our love of each other and the presence of Jesus in our daily lives.

May we carry Jesus with us as we live our lives.

James D. Beath
June 18-19, 2022