

## **FR. JOHN'S HOMILY**

### **Solemnity of the Most Holy Body & Blood of Christ, June 6, 2021**

“Eat my flesh. Drink my blood.” These are strange words when we listen to them with no scripture or religious background. “Eat my flesh” refers to cannibalism for those who do not understand. “Drink my blood” can refer to vampires and related stories, when one doesn't understand our faith.

But with the background of scripture and faith, these words, “Eat my flesh and drink my blood,” mean everything to those of us with faith. At each Mass these words remind us of the greatest gift God has given to us, the gift of Himself. In these words we are in Communion with God, through the gift of Jesus in the Eucharist.

And yet, many no longer believe. The Pew Research indicates that only 1/3 of Catholics agree with Catholic Church teachings on the real presence of Jesus. They say 43% believe it is symbolic receiving of Jesus. There was a downward trend of membership in Christianity overall before the Pandemic, so now what will the percentages tell us?

A great concern from many of my brother priests and myself is what percentage of people did we lose during this Pandemic? Will we ever get them back? Across the board we are all back around 65 % of the people returning to Church. Yes, there are some who have medical and health reasons to continue watching online and doing spiritual communion; however there are those otherwise that could be coming who no longer feel it necessary to come back to church. Again to be in communion with God and to be nourished with the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.

It is sad. Prayerfully and hopefully they are still being nourished by God in His words and in a life of prayer. However for us at Mass, in Communion we come to draw near to God. The statistics also indicate that the more one attends Mass the higher and stronger their belief in Jesus and in His real presence becomes.

This is a great time for us to remember the real presence of Jesus in our midst. The focus of this great Solemnity of Corpus Christi is on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This Solemnity recalls the gift of Holy Thursday, when we celebrated the memory of the Last Supper. The night of Holy Thursday, we remember Jesus giving Himself to us in the Eucharist and the Holy Priesthood. It is a very powerful reminder of how important the Eucharist really is. This feast day is about remembering how special this gift is from God.

Each year, we have First Holy Communion for our second graders. This year with the Pandemic, we celebrated First Communions all during the month of May. It was special to celebrate and remember Jesus as the Bread of Life, and calling our attention and focusing on the presence of Jesus at the altar with our First Communion children. They helped us focus on the very special gift.

There is scripture and religious background to help us understand this feast day. The First Reading today is from the Book of Exodus and is about the Covenant between God and the Chosen People, with Moses acting as the spokesperson for the Chosen People. The way in which such a covenant was expressed was by sacrificing lots of bulls and collecting their blood and pouring half of that blood on the altar and sprinkling the other half over the people. The point is that the people and God are now joined by a bond of blood.

The Second Reading is from the Letter to the Hebrews. Again the focus of the reading is on blood, but showing that the sprinkling of blood only gives a bond that cannot last and is

not perfect. Yet Jesus Christ shed His blood for us. Jesus poured out His blood for us. The Letter to the Hebrews wants us to recognize that this pouring of blood makes a perfect covenant and one which will never end. Jesus is the mediator of a New Covenant. Because Jesus has died for us, we can receive eternal life.

The Gospel from Mark is the account of the Last Supper and is the narrative of the institution of the transforming mystery of Christ being with us always. Again, we hear these words, “This is my blood of the covenant which shall be shed for many.” God sacrificed Himself for many, for our salvation and our redemption, a precious gift that should call us to be filled with gratitude for having such a great and loving God.

With that background, we know, “Eat my Flesh and Drink my Blood” takes on whole new meaning and significance. During the Passover meal, Jesus gives the gift of Eternal Life, with the breaking of the bread and drinking of the wine. This meal, this Eucharist, becomes our connection then to Jesus and to what He has done for each and every one of us. And on this Feast Day, the Feast of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi, we celebrate this extraordinary gift, this remembrance, of Christ love and promise to be with us always.

It was to be a perpetual institution and covenant God established between Himself and His people. Jesus chose a meal of Bread and Wine that is transformed into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, of Himself for all time. There is no greater gift.

Last week at the ordinations of 5 new priests, there was a rite, when each of the men now newly ordained kneel before the Bishop and places his hands on the chalice and paten carrying the host and wine. The Bishop says: “Receive the oblation of the holy people, to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord’s cross. Amen.”

This is great reminder for us all on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

### **St. Augustine**

*“You ought to know what you have received, what you are going to receive and what you ought to receive daily.”*

### **Mother Teresa**

*“Jesus has made Himself the Bread of Life to give us life. Night and day, He is there. If you really want to grow in love, come back to the Eucharist, come back to that Adoration.”*

### **St. John Chrysostom**

*“How many of you say: I should like to see His face, His garments, His shoes. You do see Him, you touch Him, you eat Him. He gives Himself to you, not only that you may see Him, but also to be your food and nourishment.”*