

Homily for the Feast of Corpus Christi - Year C

St Peter's 5:00 PM/8:00 Sunday Masses - June 22/23, 2019

Genesis 14:18-20 "And Abram gave (Melchizedek) one tenth of everything."

Psalm 110 "You are a priest forever."

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 "This Cup is the new covenant in my blood."

Luke 9:11-17 "And all ate and were filled."

Introduction

Jesus was speaking in a desert, a desolate and empty place. His heart was moved with pity as he peered out across the people, physically and spiritually hungry, pressed in around him. Why do people gather in large crowds today? For concerts? To celebrate the Toronto Raptors basketball championship team? I know I got swept up in 'Canada's Team'. Doesn't it tell us that we have a hunger to be part of something bigger than just ourselves, something which brings us together in a kind of community to celebrate, to be fed in some deeper way?

Isn't that what they were doing when they followed Jesus out into the desert? He was giving them words of life to feed their souls, and healing their bodies. But it was the end of the day and they didn't have LRT to take them home for supper after. "They have nothing to eat. Send them away to get something," the disciples said to him. "You give them something to eat," he answers. What an interesting and startling thing to say.

There is a well known bible teacher named Jeff Cavins. He has spoken in this church several times over the years. He says that, when people tell him why they have left the Catholic Church, they often say: I had to leave. I wasn't being fed. So Jeff titled a talk "I'm not being fed: The number one Catholic eating disorder. And in his talk, he asks the question, well who is it

who has the responsibility to feed you? And what are they going to feed you?

So if we look at ourselves honestly, I think we come here today with a kind of hunger, a kind of longing, to be fed in some way. We ignore that deeper hunger most of the time. Or we keep going to the refrigerator and the pantry and it doesn't satisfy. Today's feast might help us ask: Who am I turning to for spiritual food, and what kind of food do I need? If we are listening to Jesus' words, what do we think when we hear him say: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." What does that mean to us?

The Origin of the Feast of Corpus Christi

In 1263, there was a German priest named Peter of Prague. He was a good and holy priest. But he had this dark secret that he couldn't tell people. That secret was that he had doubts about what the Church teaches about the Eucharist. Just like those in the Gospels, he asked himself, "How could this be? How can Jesus share with us His Body and Blood?" He had trouble believing that, at the words of consecration, the bread and wine became the Body and Blood of Our Savior and whether Christ actually was present in the consecrated host. And so he prayed that the Lord would increase his faith.

The next day, he celebrated mass at the tomb of St. Christina, an early martyr of the church. As soon as he said the words of consecration, the host began to bleed. Blood fell onto his hands and onto the corporal on the altar. He didn't know what to think and he began to cry. At first, he tried to hide the blood, but then interrupted the mass and announced to the people what had happened. The congregation, too, was awestruck.

Father Peter placed the host in the corporal and then wrapped both in another linen and went to see the pope, Urban IV, who then ordered an

investigation. After all of the facts had been laid out, the Holy Father declared a miracle had occurred. One year later, in 1264, the Pope instituted the feast of Corpus Christi, a special feast day to recognize and to promote the great gift of the Blessed Sacrament. 750 years later, one can see the altar where the miracle took place, the blood-stained stones, the altar cloth and fragments of the miraculous host.

Loaves and Fishes

Back in the desert, Jesus demanded of his disciples: You feed them. That was a test from Jesus. It was to make sure they understood the point that they had nothing to offer the people except a boy's lunch, five little barley loaves and two fish, but it was all Jesus needed.

He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. Do you see and hear him using the sacramental words, the same words and actions at mass today? And all ate and were filled. He blessed what little food was available, and the bread and the fish just kept on coming.

The multiplication of loaves is the only miracle, besides the resurrection itself, that is in all four gospels. It makes us think back to the Old Testament, where we see similar miracles involving food, especially the manna in the desert.

Then there is this strange event of King Melchizedek of Salem. His name means "king of righteousness", and the place he is from is Salem, which is Shalom, which means "peace". But he wasn't just a king. He was also a priest of God Most High. He brought out bread and wine, and blessed Abram after he had won a victory against several kings with a tiny force made up of a few friends. Abram must have been some impressed with the blessing, because he gave Melchizedek one tenth of everything he owned.

The “king of righteousness” appears to mysteriously come out of nowhere. It doesn't take much to see that this man who is a priest AND a king points forward to Jesus, who blesses and offers bread and wine to feed us, and to whom we owe, not just one tenth, but everything we have and are.

Paul and the Corinthians

Today, we have Paul's account of those words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper. Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth some twenty years after Jesus death and resurrection and about twenty years before the first Gospel, Mark, was written. He was angry when he heard about the social gaps between the rich and the poor. Special status was given to a privileged few, while many people present were totally ignored at the celebration of the Eucharist.

Paul reminds the people: The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my Body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my Blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Teaching about the Eucharist

Today, on this altar, God will take our little gifts, a bit of bread and wine, and transform them into the gift of himself to us. This is not a symbolic action or an empty ritual. God is offering us his own Blessed life in a way more real than anything we can imagine in our lives or in the universe.

For Catholics, we take Jesus at his word. This means the total Christ is present truly in the bread and wine. They still “look” like bread and wine but they really are the Body and Blood of Christ. Yes, it does require faith to accept this teaching. But doesn't it make sense? Jesus is the one who feeds

us. While on earth, he showed he had the power to make material food from almost nothing. But why would that feeding become lesser?

In the Eucharist, the ordinary becomes extra-ordinary: ordinary bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the Risen One, and ordinary people like you and me become the extra-ordinary Body of Christ, the Church, for the life of the world.

This Is My Body

Brothers and sisters, here is the essence of the radical gift that you and I can accept or reject. It's in the four words repeated over and over again: This is my body. In our culture, we hear: This is my body. I will do with it what I want. I will use or abuse my body for every momentary pleasure I can get out of it. I will use other peoples' bodies for my gratification. This is my body and if my body or the life growing inside it doesn't please me, I will kill that body. This is my body and I will do what I want with it, even if it means to kill the life in it.

But then we hear Jesus say: This is my body, given for you. I will lay down my life for everyone, even those who hate me. This is my body and I will give it as food for all time for those who are hungry for truth and peace and compassion, for those who are anxious, who have experienced great loss and for those who don't know why they feel empty or stuck or alone.

How To Receive Communion and Why

Eucharist is not reminiscing about or remembering someone who is absent or dead. It is a sacrament of bringing into the moment – this moment - the real presence of Jesus. Do you see the difference? When we come into the Church, we should look for Jesus presence in the tabernacle and genuflect. That is why we ask for forgiveness for our sins, so we are free and ready to receive the gift that is about to come to us. That is why we bring the gifts

up to the altar for the sacrifice - symbols of what we produce. But it is really ourselves we bring to him. That is why we bow, make a throne of our hands, say Amen, and consume the host and from the cup.

If we focus on our few loaves and fish that we have to offer, we see only what is lacking. But, if we trust him, we can bring him our little lunch, and he will shower down blessings on us that we cannot imagine and that will not run out. We are being fed. All that remains is for us to eat and to give thanks. That's Eucharist. That's the Body of Christ. That's Corpus Christi.