

Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ --- June 5-6, 2021

Think about the most solemn promise or pledges that you have made – some ritually spoken before witnesses such as at Baptism or Marriage – and others such as the pledge of allegiance to the flag, obedience to military superiors. We make other promises too that are not usually verbally expressed. Being a parent implies a pledge to be a guide, protector, and role model for your child. We owe fairness to co-workers, best efforts to our employers, respect to fellow human beings and care for creation as a whole. All these need to be taken seriously.

We also make a most serious pledge at every Mass in receiving Holy Communion or making a spiritual communion. In our “Amen” when we receive Holy Communion we pledge to receive and become the Body and Blood of Christ for others. Today we want to look at Christ’s great gift of Himself to us in Holy Communion and remind ourselves of the pledge we on our part are making in receiving Holy Communion. But first of all, it would be good for us to look a little deeper at the sacrifice that Christ Himself made and is making and at its meaning.

On this solemnity we look into Christ’s willingness to sacrifice himself for others, and in today’s readings we ponder the power and depth of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. In short, in a similar but much deeper manner than Moses’s actions in the first reading, Jesus’ Blood ratifies and sanctifies our relationship with God. When we come together in Mass to remember the Last Supper, Jesus’ complete gift of himself in love becomes present to us once again so that we can continue to be nourished and transformed.

In today’s Gospel Jesus speaks of the new covenant in his blood. Those of us who might be a bit squeamish about blood or having our blood drawn for medical testing, may find all the talk about blood in today’s readings a bit much. However, the blood in our veins is an important sign of life. Without blood we die. So blood was used in the religious rituals in the Old Testament to signify life and the sharing of life. It was used to sanctify altars, consecrate priests and seal covenants between God and the people. Thus it was that Moses took the blood from the sacrifice animal and

after the people had agreed to follow the dictates of the covenant God wished to make with them, he sprinkled it on the altar as a sign as a sign of their commitment to the Lord and then on the people to signify the communion of their life with God.

It was fitting then that Jesus at the Last Supper would speak about his sacrifice on the cross as the blood of the new covenant.

The people of Israel after making this covenant with God continually tried to keep the covenant. Understandably, they were not able to keep it perfectly. Therefore, God allowed for sacrifices of animals to make atonement for their sins. The blood of the sacrificed animals symbolized the people offering themselves to God asking for his mercy. Individual sacrifices could be made too, but every year on the feast of Yom Kippur a special sacrifice was made asking God's forgiveness for the sins of all the people. The sacrifice of these animals was made annually as a "cover" for the people's sins so that they might be able to go forward with their lives.

It is this event that the reading from Hebrews has in mind as it speaks of Christ's sacrifice, not of an animal but of his own blood, for the covering or forgiveness of our sins. The author speaks of how much more powerful the blood of Jesus is compared to that of the blood of the animal sacrifices. His is the only sacrifice needed and it once and for all brings forgiveness of sins and eternal communion with God.

Jesus' Blood is that of the Lamb of God and the final sacrifice and only sacrifice needed for our salvation. In the story of Exodus the blood of the lamb on the doorpost kept the angel of death from entering the homes of the Israelites. St. Paul sees that by the blood of Christ we can escape the death caused by sin.

Now we are getting to what sharing in the Eucharist means for us and demands from us..

At the Last Supper Jesus did not just give us the new covenant in the blood of his sacrifice on the cross to us alone. Receiving communion is also the way we commit ourselves to participating in his sacrifice and taking up his mission. Last week on Trinity Sunday we talked about

being made in the image and likeness of God and God completing the process by inviting us to share in God's life. In fully taking on our humanity, Jesus had a body with blood in its veins like ours. When we received Holy Communion we truly receive his body and blood with his humanity and divinity under the appearance of bread and wine. Though it is now the glorified Christ that we receive it is still his whole person.

So when Jesus says, "This is my body," and "This is my blood," he is not talking about some perfect human body, but his very own body that experienced all the trials of this life – illness and tiredness – and one that was beaten and nailed to the cross and now risen from death in glory. This is the body that Jesus offers us in the Eucharist and what we are saying "Amen" to. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ we become the Body and Blood of Christ. We are taken up not only into the divinity of Christ but also taken up into the depths of his and our humanity. Through the Eucharist we enter with Jesus into communion with all people of the world and all their joys and struggles. We are called to be the body of Christ in actions of service to all.

In our own bodies we too can be broken like bread for the nourishment of all, and our blood poured out for the healing of the world. In the Eucharist our lives are again and again renewed in Christ so that in Him we can be life-giving and share our life with others.

In the God's gift of the Eucharist there is so much to be thankful for including the fact that Jesus is truly and always present for us in the tabernacles of our churches. During this last year – being unable to always receive Holy Communion or participate at Mass in person has made us more aware of a great gift that we can easily take for granted. The Eucharist is a gift given freely and continually by God to all who believe. In today's solemnity we give thanks for this great gift by accepting this gift and committing ourselves to use this life-giving meal to sustain us in our mission as his disciples. Jesus ends today's gospel by saying he would not drink of the fruit of the vine again until he drinks it new in the kingdom of God. As we join ourselves to him in this Mass we also look forward to joining him in the fullness of the kingdom to come.