

Reflections for the Celebration of Corpus Christi

Amid news from far and near that speak of continued painful events in our world and Church, I invite you to enter with me into the wonder of the gift of Jesus to us that is the Holy Eucharist.

On Holy Thursday, Pope John Paul II published his Encyclical on the Eucharist. Clearly it is a commentary on the feast we celebrate today.

The readings from the Scriptures for the Feast of Our Lord's Body and Blood emphasize the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist, very much as the Fifth Mystery of the new Mysteries of Light of the Rosary has us prayerfully consider the Eucharist especially in its sacrificial, redemptive dimension. In his Encyclical the Holy Father recalls the words of St. Paul in the most ancient written account of the Eucharist, namely, that in the Eucharist we "proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)

In the first reading (Exodus 24:3-8), we need to observe closely how the covenant between God and God's people made through Moses took shape:

- Moses built an altar of sacrifice
- On the altar he had young men from the various tribes sacrifice animals, "young bulls"
- Then he read the covenant to the people, including God's commandments
- The people responded, "All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do."
- The covenant was then sealed with the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifices - what had become God's now touched the people and sealed their commitment to God

The passage from the Letter to the Hebrews makes it clear how the blood of Christ is now that which is operative - something much more powerful than the blood of animals. In the Gospel, Jesus announces, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many."

The Holy Father, with the Church through the ages, asks us to remember that our sharing in the Eucharist entails also a commitment like that made by God's people of old. Touched by the gift of the living Christ, we should be open to his transforming power and recommit ourselves to the baptismal and confirmation calls also to transform the world.

This is not a poetic ideal, but a genuine invitation to real change, once we know what needs to be changed. And there is so much. At the national level, after the realization last year of the reality of the sexual abuse issue, which affected such a very small percentage of our clergy, major efforts are underway to educate and to guarantee that no youth or child will be hurt in any effort for which the Church is responsible.

There are spiritual duties also: to participate in the Eucharist with understanding; to keep the commandments with all of the energy that entails; to seek to live up to the vision of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, especially the Beatitudes. This we commit ourselves afresh to do, relying on the strength and promises of Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist.

This past Sunday at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen we again observed the Feast of the Eucharist with a procession, including the traditional three Benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus moved amid the people, and all who participated must have been touched by the nearness of the Lord. The lovely singing of the choir, and the colorful participation of the Knights of Columbus helped frame the ancient ceremonies. It was a special joy to see our seminarians serving with faith and dignity the great Eucharist that celebrated the Lord's gift of the Eucharist to us.