

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)

June 10, 2012

All this emphasis on blood in what we just heard. Moses is out in the desert of Sinai with the people. God has just spoken to him the laws of the covenant. The people have said, "All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do." Moses first turns to the altar, the symbol of God, and sprinkles it with the blood of bulls, and then to the people and sprinkles them with blood, declaring it "the blood of the covenant," ratifying the special relationship between God and the people Israel.

Hebrews speaks of how the blood of Jesus is the blood that saves us once and for all. Again we hear about the importance of blood, contrasting the blood of animals with the blood of Christ with its unique power to "cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God." Christ the great high priest enters the dwelling place of the Father and there intercedes for us forever.

Finally, in today's Gospel we hear one of the oldest accounts of the Last Supper. The setting is the feast of Unleavened Bread, and it is the day for the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, a feast that reminded the people of Israel of the night when their children were spared because the blood of the lamb had been wiped across the threshold of their homes. On the memorial feast of this night Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it. This is my body." Then, he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many." The blood of the covenant...

In all these readings the concern is with the covenant, that binding relationship between the people and God, and with the blood that sealed this covenant.

Being sprinkled with blood has little attraction today. It's not something to be messed around with. But we are in the realm of symbol here. Blood was seen as sacred, carrying life. It was a symbol of the life God gave. To sprinkle blood on the altar was to recognize God as the source and giver of life. To sprinkle blood on the people was only done after they had heard the commands of the Lord and

agreed to keep them. Blood seals the agreement and joins them to God in a covenant of life. "All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do," say the people, and Moses sprinkles them with blood.

In the Second Reading the author is reminding us that the blood of bulls and goats and calves was carried by the high priest into the Temple once a year on the Day of Atonement. But this has given way to the one sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. By shedding his blood for us, Jesus is mediator of a new covenant in blood, his blood. And when we eat his body and drink his blood, we renew this covenant through him.

It is important to think about what this means, when we come here each Sunday to renew our covenant with God. What happens when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ? What difference does it make? Do we understand what it means to live as a people of the covenant? Now it is up to us to say, "All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do." We pledge to live according to the way and teachings of Jesus.

We are privileged whenever we receive Eucharist. We take to ourselves the Body and Blood of the Lord. And this action commits us to care for the body of the Lord, which is the church. That's what Paul means when he speaks of discerning and recognizing the body. This is the body for which Christ died, the body that was born from the cross.

Eucharist is about our becoming at the table what is present on the table. Christ is given to us so that we become the body of Christ in the world and care for the body of Christ in the world. To receive it is to open ourselves to allow Christ in at the most profound level and to be open to where he leads us.

The feast of the Body and Blood of Christ speaks to us of our life in God. May the Body and Blood of Christ bring us to everlasting life.

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor