

# Corpus Christi

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We have just listened to St Mark's account of the Last Supper. In saying the words, "This is my body...this is my blood" Our Lord was fulfilling the promise he made after feeding the 5000 that he would give us the bread of life. At that time many of the disciples found it too much and walked away. Jesus did not call them back and say, "you have misunderstood me", he simply turned to Peter and the others who were close to him and asked if they would go away too. Despite the challenge to common sense, Peter accepted the Lord's word: "To whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life." From 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year for four weeks we will hear St John's account of Our Lord's words in the Bread of Life discourse so I will not dwell on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist today. Instead, I invite you to reflect on another aspect of the Eucharist to which our first two readings draw our attention.

Our first reading tells how Moses sealed the Covenant between Israel and God by offering a sacrifice setting aside half the blood for God and sprinkling the rest on the people to purify them and set them aside as belonging to God. It is a communion sacrifice that expresses their union with God unlike a holocaust where the whole animal was consumed with fire on the altar. The people give but they also receive. The Letter to the Hebrews explains how this Old Testament sacrifice has been replaced by the sacrifice of Christ. He has entered beyond the veil of the temple into the presence of the Father in Heaven. Risen and ascended he stands at the right hand of the Father offering to him for us in the timelessness of heaven the sacrifice offered once for us in time on the altar of the cross. That living sacrifice purifies us here and now and unites with God our Father. St Thomas Aquinas tells us that one drop of Christ's blood suffices to wash away the sins of the whole world.

The Catechism makes the following points about the Mass as a sacrifice:

It is a sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for the work of creation. In the Eucharistic sacrifice the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and the Resurrection of Christ. Through Christ the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all that God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity.

It is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all "thanksgiving."

It is the sacrifice of praise by which the Church sings the glory of God in the name of all creation. This sacrifice of praise is possible only through Christ: he unites the faithful to his person, to his praise, and to his intercession, so that the sacrifice of praise to the Father is offered through Christ and with him, to be accepted in him.

The Eucharist is a sacrifice above all because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross. The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: "The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different." "In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner."

The whole Church unites herself to his intercession for all people with the Father. In the Eucharist our, our praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering. This includes not only the members still here on earth, but also those already in the glory of heaven - the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints. In the Eucharist the Church is as it were at the foot of the cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ. Mass is also offered for the faithful departed who "have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified," so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ. When she knew death was near St Monica said to her son, St Augustine: "Put this body anywhere! Don't trouble yourselves about it! I simply ask you to remember me at the Lord's altar wherever you are."