

# Corpus Christi - The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

## **First reading:**

*The Gift of Manna*

*(Deuteronomy 8.2-3, 14-16)*

Here the Church sets before us the model for the Eucharist, that is, God's care in feeding his people during the 40-year desert trek of the Exodus from Egypt.

During this time the Israelites were fed with manna; they called this 'bread from heaven', so that it has become the model for the Eucharistic bread.

As in all folktales, the story has gradually grown in the telling, but originally manna seems to have been the wholly unexpected and seemingly miraculous provision of a sweet substance exuded from a tamarisk bush. The Hebrews did not know what it was, and, with a wordplay typical of the Bible, etymologized it as 'manhu', the Hebrew for 'What is it?'

The reading also stresses that this heavenly gift was a symbol of divine Wisdom, God's revelation of himself given from heaven. Hence the saying, quoted by Jesus to Satan during his Testing in the Desert: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' The manna became the symbol and reminder of God's unfailing care for his people throughout their journey, just as the Eucharist is the expression of God's care for his people today.

## **Question:**

*How does the Eucharist reveal God's love?*

## **Second reading:**

*The One Body of Christ*

*(1 Corinthians 10.16-17)*

Paul, in writing to that difficult and divided community at Corinth, chides the people for their disunity and selfishness.

There were some rich members of the community, who got to the Eucharist early, took all the best places, and proceeded to unpack their hampers and feast, while the latecomers - presumably the workers and slaves - justifiably felt excluded and remained hungry.

In the strongest terms, Paul insists that the Eucharist must be the symbol and expression of unity, and that those who prevent it being so are making themselves 'answerable for the body and blood of the Lord'.

Paul seems to use 'the body of Christ' interchangeably of both the Eucharistic bread and the Eucharistic body, which is the community, united in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is difficult to see when he means one, and when the other. He obviously regards them both as equally important and equally sacred.

Later in the Letter he will explain that the community is an organism, in which everyone has their own, individually special part to play, all living with the Spirit of Christ as the life-giving principle. Unless this life is truly shared it is distorted and fails of its purpose.

## **Question:**

*How is it possible to make the Eucharist an expression of unity?*

**Gospel:**      *The True Bread of Life*

*(John 6.51-59)*

This is the final section of Jesus' great discourse in the gospel of John on the Eucharist, delivered in the synagogue at Capernaum. It is in the form of a synagogue sermon, commenting in turn on the phrases of Psalm 78: 'He gave them bread- from heaven - to eat.'

Jesus explains that these words are truly fulfilled not by Moses' historic gift of manna in the desert, but by the Father's continuous and repeated gift of Eucharistic bread. The discourse has the same pattern as the Mass, instruction followed by eating.

The first two sections of the discourse were about God's gift of revelation in Christ, which is accepted and assimilated by belief in the teaching of Jesus. Now we come to the final section on God's gift of Christ as food. Particularly striking are two points. First, the stress on eating: the word used for 'eat my flesh' is full of the reality of eating; it really means 'chew' and designates the sacramental eating as a real assimilation of the nourishing food. The second point is that 'my flesh for the life of the world' links firmly to the Last Supper: the Christ that we receive is the Christ at the very moment of his redemptive act of self-offering.

**Question:**

*How does Christ nourish us in the Eucharist?*

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