Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ – Cycle A

Dt. 8: 2-3, 14b-16a; I Cor. 10: 16-17; Jn 6: 51-58

June 25/26, 2011

Two short weeks ago, we all were here for Pentecost and we sang:

*Come Lord Jesus! Send us your Spirit! Renew the face of the earth!*

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Yes, we asked Jesus to come into our hearts, into our minds, into our lives to transform us into his heart, his mind, his life, so that we might go forth and renew the face of the earth in the power of his Spirit.

O, that if all Catholics worldwide would awaken each and every morning with that prayer in their hearts:

*Come Lord Jesus! Send us your Spirit! Renew the face of the earth!*

The world would indeed be renewed. Over one billion strong are we, we Catholics. If only on one day we all would wake up and pray that prayer fervently! We would change the world, for we would be united to Christ and to each other. We would be on that day, one body, and one spirit in Christ.

That is what we celebrate today on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of our Lord. We celebrate our oneness with Jesus in his body, his blood that is ever present to us, and which draws us up into God himself in a miraculous fashion.

The Real Presence of Jesus Christ!

Yes, my friends, the Eucharist is the real, actual Body and Blood of Jesus, not a symbol, not a sign, but really and truly Jesus, his body, his blood, his soul and his divinity under the appearances of bread and wine.

Now there are many in the world who do not believe this. Some Catholics don’t. That is why the face of the earth has yet to be renewed. It will never be renewed as long as there is doubt and disbelief among us about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Many say, “Come on, Deacon Bob! It is only a symbol, a sign. It represents Jesus, yes, but come on; it isn’t his actual body and blood. Jesus may have said that in the Gospel, but he was speaking in analogies; it was only a figure of speech. He did that a lot in the Gospel.”

Well, I think I can show you that Jesus did not speak symbolically when he spoke of his body and his blood, but rather he spoke literally. He meant exactly what he said. I can prove it if you are of open mind.

Yes, it is true that Jesus many times in the Gospel used figures of speech just like all the people of his time did. They often exaggerated to make a point. We do the same today, don’t we? For instance, we might say, “I wouldn’t go there unless you want to open a can of worms.” Now, you know what I would mean if I said that. You wouldn’t take it literally, would you? You’d realize I didn’t mean a tin can of worms you could pick off the shelf at Woodman’s would somehow be opened. No. Well, Jesus said a lot of things like that. Remember what he said to Nicodemus, the Pharisee who admired him but didn’t want anyone to know it, so he came to Jesus in the middle of the night to question him? Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Unless you are born again you cannot have eternal life.” Now, Nicodemus took Jesus literally. He thought, “How can I possibly go back into my mother’s womb and be born again?” Jesus, though, did not let Nicodemus walk away with the wrong idea. He didn’t want Nicodemus to be confused by an analogy. No. So explained what he literally meant, i.e., that unless one is baptized you cannot inherit eternal life.

A second example: Lazarus. Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was seriously ill. A few days later, he said, “Lazarus has fallen asleep.” (We say the same thing don’t we? We mean that the person has died.) Well, the people who heard Jesus say this took him literally, and thought, “Wow! I am glad he is only sleeping. I was afraid he had died.” What did Jesus do when he found out they were taking him literally, when he meant it figuratively? He didn’t let them walk away with the wrong idea; he told them very bluntly, “Lazarus is dead.”

In other words, any time Jesus spoke figuratively and the people took him literally, he corrected them. He made sure they got the point before they walked away.

Now, what happened in the Gospel accounts whenever Jesus talked about his body and his blood? *The people took him literally*. They thought, “My God! What is the matter with this man? He is saying that people have to eat his flesh and drink his blood. This is too much for us! We are out of here!” And they walked away. What did Jesus do? He didn’t rush over to try to keep them from walking away. He didn’t start telling them they had misunderstood a figure of speech. He didn’t correct them because they got it exactly right. They understood what he meant. He let them walk away, and then turned to his apostles and asked, “Are you too going to walk away from this teaching?” None did, and Peter said, “To whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life!”

Yes, Jesus meant exactly what he had said; no doubt about it. It is truly his Body and his Blood.

It is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, not a sign, not a symbol, but Jesus truly. All the Scriptures attest to this; all the early Fathers of the Church taught it; Christians everywhere until the Protestant revolution believed it; all the martyrs died believing it.

So there you are. Either it is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, OR Jesus was a liar and we all are idolaters, worshippers of false gods, because we genuflect before the consecrated bread and wine and if it is not God, then we are breaking the First Commandment.

My friends, Jesus was no liar.

We are not idolaters.

When we eat the Body of Christ and drink the Blood of Christ we become more like Jesus himself. In fact, we become Jesus in a certain sense. We become his body and his blood in today’s world. That is why we suffer sometimes in life, because we grow into the life of Jesus, his blood and his body, which suffered also in the world for our salvation.

In other words, in our receiving the Eucharist, Jesus takes us up into himself. We become like him. He is already like us in all things but sin. He wants us to be like him, to be him, by eating and drinking of his body and blood.

That is why St. Paul said in today’s second reading that we participate in the Body and Blood of Jesus. We become more perfectly him whom we receive.

How else could Jesus have promised eternal life to us? Only if we eat and drink of Him, only if we grow into the “full stature” of Jesus in today’s world will we live forever. It is impossible for humans to live forever without Him; common sense teaches us this, but it is not impossible for Jesus to live forever for he is both God and man and that is why we are to eat his body and drink his blood – so we become like him and inherit what is his, i.e., eternal life with the Father.

Jesus takes us up into himself where he is with the Father and the Spirit.

His Body and his Blood, his soul and his divinity, are completely present in both the form of bread and the form of wine. In our eating and drinking, we are in no way dividing or diminishing Jesus – He is truly and completely present in each fragment, in each drop. When we receive him in this way, we are embraced by his love.

What we hold in our hands had more value that all the wealth of the world combined. It is priceless. We must receive him worthily.

And remember: Our reception of the Eucharist makes us as individuals more and more like Jesus. Our reception also unites us to each other so that as one people, one Church, we are ever more united in one faith, one baptism, and one call to go out and renew the world.

Let us, as we approach our Lord today to receive him, pray in the silence of our hearts,

*Come Lord Jesus! Send forth your Spirit to renew the face of the earth!*

*Come Spirit of God!*

*Come Lord Jesus, Come!*