

Homily-CorpusChristi09

This weekend we celebrate the premier sacrament of us lives. Most of us have received Eucharist since we were in second grade. We have received Eucharist for almost all of our Christian lives or at as far back as we can remember. The Eucharist has helped to shape how we think about being a Christian and how we conceive of God.

In this homily I would like to reflect on the meaning of this important sacrament and how we live out this sacrament.

Exodus

The first reading of today's Mass helps us to understand what Eucharist means. The reading is taken from the section of the Book of Exodus entitled the "Book of the Covenant" which contains the 10 Commandments and other laws given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Moses reads the words of the covenant to the people. The people agree to obey the covenant. Moses then ratifies or makes the covenant official through a rite of blood. Moses sprinkles blood on the altar which represents God and then sprinkles blood on the people. The covenant between Yahweh and his people is now a reality. The blood signifies the life force that seals the commitment between the Holy One and Israel. Not only are God and the people bound together irrevocably, but the people themselves are united to one another. They acclaim with one voice their loyalty to all the words and ordinances of God.

In the Gospel Jesus says after he drinks from the cup, "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many (Mark 14:24)." Jesus is saying that this meal that he celebrates with the disciples a new covenant between God and his people. Just as God established a relationship with his people in the Hebrew Scriptures now God establishes a new relationship with through the shedding of the blood of Jesus.

Hebrews

The second reading of today's Mass is taken from the ninth chapter of the Book of Hebrews. The background for Hebrews 9 is the Day of Atonement in which the Jewish High priest entered the Holy of Holies in the tent which held the arc of the covenant and offered two sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. The first sacrifice was offered for the sins of the High Priest and his family and the second sacrifice was offered for the sins that the people had committed within the past year. After offering sacrifice the High Priest would sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat of the Arc of the Covenant. This action would bring about forgiveness of sins and the unity of God with His People.

An animal was sacrificed to release its blood. The blood was the element in which life resided. The blood is the divine element in a person and when the blood was poured out on the altar or sprinkled on the place of expiation it was an effective symbol of the purification of sin and of the re-establishment of union between God and the person.

The author of Hebrews says that instead of entering the tent with the Arc of the Covenant Jesus entered the sanctuary in heaven. Through the offering of his life on the cross Jesus has taken away the sins of those who believe in him. Jesus is thus the mediator of a new covenant. Just as the High Priest offered sacrifices year after year which brought about the union of God and His People so that sacrifice of Christ both took away of the sins of God's People and is the means of unity between God and His People. The forgiveness of sins by Jesus has made eternal life possible.

Gospel Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Mark makes it very clear that the Last Supper is Jesus' celebration of the Passover with his disciples. The Passover was the celebration of God's liberation of His People from their slavery in Egypt. In the story God tells each family to sacrifice a lamb. The families are to take the blood of the lamb and smear it above their doorposts. When the angel of death goes through the land of Egypt he is to pass over the homes which are smeared with the blood of lamb. As we hear the account of the Last Supper we are to think about the People being saved from death by the blood of the lamb. In John's Gospel Jesus dies on the cross at the very moment when the Passover lambs are butchered in the temple. The ratification of the New Covenant came through the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

During the Last Supper Jesus tells the disciples to take and eat his body and to take and drink his blood. When we hear this reading we often only hear these commands as referring to the true presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist. As Jesus eats the Last Supper his words speak also of the total self gift that he will make on the cross. As we celebrate Eucharist we are called to totally give ourselves to others as Jesus did in his life and in his death. The Eucharist calls us to this total self gift.

At the end of meal Jesus states, "I solemnly assure you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine, until the day when I drink it new in the reign of God (Mark 24:26). This verse that Jesus states at the end of the Last Supper is a verse that says that Jesus will now begin to fast. Fasting had various meanings in the Old Testament. One of the meanings of fasting was preparing for the day of the Lord. Jesus' vow of fasting is a prophetic symbol of his imminent death. Jesus who fasts at this meal looks forward to fasting in the kingdom of God.

THE EUCHARIST IS THE NEW COVENANT IN JESUS' BLOOD

The Mass readings that we have heard proclaimed present two main themes: covenant and sacrifice. The Hebrew Scriptures tell the story of the various covenants that God established with His People. Covenants were agreements between God and His People. The covenants between God and His People showed that God had an unbreakable bond with His People. The Last Supper points ahead to the shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross which **reaffirms God's unbreakable bond with us.**

The sacrifice of Jesus marks the beginning of the new covenant. Its essence is self-giving love. It begins with God's love for us and the self-communication and self-offering of God's Son for us. It is the totally free and loving response of the Son in his humanity, shown especially in his suffering and death. In it we are taken into the self-giving love of the Father and Son.

Each Eucharist commemorates and celebrates God's covenant relationship with fallen yet graced humanity. In faith we use the term "covenant" to signify bondedness, irrevocable relationship, and unbroken union as well as God's invitation to us and our response enacted through the Eucharist. The Eucharist renews and deepens the conversion first forged, signed, and sealed among and for believers through the waters of baptism.

Our bondedness to and with God through the covenant is sacramentally begun at the bath of baptism and sacramentally renewed through the bread and cup of the Eucharist. We dine at the Eucharist to be sustained in the divine life of God begun at baptism and culminating in the "supper of the Lamb."

In the Eucharist we recommit ourselves to God's covenant-in hearing and obeying the word of the Lord and in celebrating the Eucharistic action. The Eucharist is thus a sign of our conversion to the covenant and a means for that covenant to be renewed in our lives. This is similar to the Israelites who recommitted themselves to their covenant with their God with Moses.

THE EUCHARIST IS SACRAMENTAL SACRIFICE

As a sacrifice the Eucharist is a constant reminder of the total self-surrender of Jesus for us and our salvation. The Eucharist is born from and returns us back to the one sacrifice of Christ.

The Eucharist perpetuates the sacrifice of Christ in a sacramental way. We are engaged in sacrificial signs and symbols that we use to perpetuate the sacrifice of Christ so that we can become holy as Christ is holy.

The Sacrifice of the Cross and its sacramental renewal in the Mass are one and the same. The Mass is at once a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, of propitiation and satisfaction.

Who offers the sacrifice?

The priest offers the sacrifice in the person of Christ. It is Christ who works in and through the sacraments.

The Lord's command, "Do this in remembrance of me" shows that we are to live our lives in obedience to Christ and in imitation of his example of what it means to give our lives in self-surrender and self-sacrifice. The sacrifice should be lived out by us in lives of self-transcendence, self-sacrifice, and service.

THE EUCHARIST SHOWS THE ACTIVE PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

Our focus during the liturgy can become overly focused on what we receive rather than what we participate in during the liturgy.

Since the Middle Ages we have used the term transubstantiation to describe the meaning of the presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist. We believe that the bread and the wine that the priest consecrates on the altar become the real presence of the risen Christ. The substance of the bread and wine changes into the Body and Blood of Christ. The bread and wine still seem to smell, taste, and feel like bread and wine but in faith we know that has been a real change into the presence of the risen Christ.

Not only do we experience the true presence of Christ in the bread and wine which become the true presence of the risen Christ but Christ is present in manifold ways. The presence of Christ is in the Eucharistic species, the priest, the Word, the worship of the people. Thus Christ is present and active in the liturgy in various ways. Pope Paul says that Christ is present in his Church. This is especially true when the church does works of mercy as Christ works through the Church.

This teaching reminds us that Christ is active in our lives not only when we receive communion but also in our lives outside the doors of the church. Truly the presence of Christ is present in our lives in manifold ways.

In the Eucharist we experience the complete paschal mystery of Christ until the end of time. Through the liturgy Christians continue to experience the paschal mystery. What was completed once and for all in the first century is experienced really, fully and as completely as possible in succeeding centuries. All liturgies are a foretaste of the completion of the paschal mystery at the end of time.

CONCLUSION

In the Eucharist we celebrate the new covenant that is established between ourselves and God in baptism. Eucharist renews us as we live out this covenant with God. In the Eucharist we remember the sacrifice of Christ and make that sacrifice a reality in the present sacramentally. Eucharist calls us to not only celebrate the sacrifice of Christ but also to be a people who sacrifice for others. Eucharist reminds us that we receive the Sacred Body and Blood of our Savior and it reminds us that our Savior lives within us. To be a people who not only receive Eucharist but a people who live Eucharist we are to show forth Christ's presence in our lives of worship and mercy.