

## HOMILY

### *The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ June 10, 2007*

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Today's Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ offers us the occasion to think about the great gift of the Mass. As you know, the Liturgy of the Eucharist is both a meal and a sacrifice. In the past years, sacrifice was in the forefront in order to appreciate the great suffering that Jesus endured for our salvation. But in recent decades, the symbol of "meal" began to take precedence in order to recall the last supper and communion we share with the whole church.

The meal aspect is so recognizable. It is even a formal meal with candles and an altar cloth; ushers present the food which servers hand to the priest who, in turn, presents them to the head of the house, God our eternal Father. Although nobody is hurt here at the altar, unlike the animal sacrifices of long ago, there is still a sacrifice that takes place as we gather here at our meal.

Look at the bread and wine. The wheat endured prairie hail and storms, was wrenched from its stalk and then ground to a fine grain to become our delicate communion wafers, specially embossed with pictures of our faith. The grapes survived sweltering heat and torrential rains, grew amid flies and gnats, were squashed to a pulp and refined to our pleasant golden wine. But lest we stop here, there is so much more that is substantial. Underneath the appearance of this bread is the actual body of Christ—a body which had a whole life and gave its all to loving friends. A body that suffered insults and physical pain, and finally a lonely death.

And this mellow wine is the condensation of the blood that flowed through the veins of Jesus. The blood which supplied oxygen to his marvelous brain and energy to his limbs and a blush to his expressive face. This is the same blood that splattered when he was beaten and bled from his stabbed side and drowned him when he hung in asphyxiation on Calvary. If Jesus' body had not been broken and his blood had not been drained from his corpse, then this meal that you and I share in today would just be a pleasant snack among well meaning friends.

And yet, what we have here is both meal and sacrifice. We don't appreciate how marvelous the miracle is! Do we not believe that Jesus sacrificed his body so we could eat to live—not just now, but to live forever? Not just to continue to go on with our human lives, but also to share in his divine life? Friends, this is what Christ Jesus brings to this table—his whole life and his death as an acceptable offering to the Father.

Nevertheless, for any meal to be complete, the guests must bring their offering. And what do we bring to this table? Hopefully, the same thing Jesus does, on a more humble but just-as-real level. We bring our new love or old selves, our engagement or divorce, our rebellious or dutiful children, our persistent doubts and barely believable hopes. Like Jesus, we bring our present life and pending death as our best offering to the Father. All of this is happening at this moment. The famous life of Jesus and the unknown strivings of our own lives are brought together in this holy place. No one is excused. No experience is denied. Every single thing that has happened to Jesus and any of us is necessary for this sacrificial meal to be complete and acceptable to God.

This is what we celebrate at the Holy Eucharist, at this Mass. We mere mortals are privileged to eat the food of angels. And even that is just a taste, a sample of the meal that God is right now preparing for us in the heavenly banquet that will be ready for you and me.