

## The Body and Blood of Christ – C Cycle June 2, 2013

**INTRODUCTION** – (*Genesis, 14, 18-20; I Corinthians 11, 23-26; Luke 9, 11b-17*)

Today's first reading takes us to the Holy Land to the time of Abraham, about 1850 years before Christ. Abraham's nephew, Lot, had been captured by some local tribes and Abraham set out to rescue him, which he did. On his return, he passed by Salem, which is Jerusalem today. He was met by Melchizedek, who was both king and high priest in that district. It was not unusual at that time for the same person to be both king and high priest. Melchizedek offered bread and wine. It is hard to know whether it was offered as refreshment to Abraham or if it was offered as a sacrifice to God Most High. At any event, some of the early fathers in the Church saw this gesture as a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. (Our stained-glass window on the side depicts this scene.)

The second reading from St. Paul is especially significant in that the Letter to the Corinthians was written 10 to 15 years before the earliest gospel; thus our second reading is the oldest description of the Eucharist that is in existence today. The language Paul uses indicates this is a tradition that is authentic and reliable. He received it from the Lord and he handed it on to the Corinthians as he had received it. Receiving it "from the Lord" does not necessarily mean that he received it directly, but that it is an essential part of the gospel and has its origin in the teaching and the life of **Jesus Christ**.

**HOMILY:** To understand this first little story you have to know that here at St. Boniface on Sundays I let the Communion ministers clean the chalices back in the sacarium. This story is about a little boy of three who was brought to Mass for the first time. He was intrigued by everything the priest was doing. At his parish after communion, the priest cleaned the chalices at the altar. When the priest finished cleaning the chalices the child turned to his mother and said: "he's finished doing dishes mom, now can we go home?"

A teenager's mother reported that when her son came home from church camp, he said: "Communion was the only decent meal they had." At that camp, there must have been a cook who couldn't cook; but on a more spiritual level the boy is right, receiving Christ in the Eucharist is infinitely superior to any other food we might be able to imagine. Jesus said, "do not labor for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." (Jn. 6,27)

Numerous times Jesus talks about faith. For example he says: "have faith," "your faith has saved you," "if you had faith the size of a mustard seed," "oh you of little faith." Today we celebrate a feast that is a great challenge to our faith: that at Mass bread and wine are changed from being bread and wine into being the body and blood of Jesus. It's not merely a symbolic reminder of Jesus; it is Jesus. His words are clear: "this is my body," "this is the cup of my blood." "Do this in memory of me."

I do not understand how people can easily accept that the Son of God became human but have difficulty accepting that the Son of God could become food and drink for us. "My flesh is real food, by blood is true drink," he tells us in John's gospel (Jn. 6,55). Unfortunately, many prefer to believe what they see rather than what Jesus tells us. When they see the host is no different after the consecration, they do not believe it is different.

How can we approach this mystery? First of all, we all know we can't always believe what we see. One proof of that is when a magician does a magic trick. We know when we are watching magic, the magician is fooling our eyes and we marvel how the magician makes it look so real. Other proof that we can't always believe what we see is that some things look very much alike and we can mistake one thing for another, such as a vitamin pill, a sleeping pill and a little piece of candy like an M & M. That's why we have to be careful where we keep our pills if there are little children around.

How can it happen that at Mass the bread and wine become Christ's body and blood? On one level, the spiritual, believing part of me says it's simply because Jesus said so. Whenever Jesus said something, it happened. So I just accept what Jesus says as it is Jesus who tells us: "have faith in me." I still try to understand this mystery from a natural perspective. One thing that helps me understand the Eucharist a little better is to think of a seed. Whether it is a microscopic seed or an avocado seed, a seed has power; it has the energy to produce life. A tiny seed can produce a giant oak tree or a huge elephant. Where does it get that energy? Ultimately God put it there. If God can put life energy in a tiny seed, God can put himself into a tiny piece of bread and transform it into his own divine self. Theologians call this transubstantiation (a change of substance). When I think this way, it helps the logical part of my mind accept the mystery a little more easily. As Jesus promises through faith in him and his divine presence in Communion, he is giving us eternal life.

How do we get that kind of faith? I think it's by constantly reminding ourselves what Jesus said when we receive Communion: "this is my body," "this is the cup of my blood," and by receiving him with that devotion and conviction. When we attend Mass and receive communion each week, our faith grows stronger; when we stay away, our faith gets weaker. Besides receiving Jesus with faith, I would like to add we also have two holy hours each week, which are meant to help us strengthen our devotion to the Eucharist.

One more story: A mother did her best to explain the Mass to her young daughter. When she went to receive Communion and then returned to her pew the little girl asked, "When will it be my turn to have lunch with God?" A very perceptive little girl. Not only do we have lunch with God, but God provides the food: his own body and blood. Amen.

**Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – C Cycle**  
**June 9, 2013**

**INTRODUCTION:** *(1 Kings 17,17-24; Galatians 1,11-19; Luke 7,11-17)*

Eight hundred sixty years before Christ, in the northern Kingdom of Israel, there ruled a king named Ahab and a queen who was the infamous Jezebel. They promoted paganism and tried to destroy the Jewish religion. Thus they came into conflict with Elijah - one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. As a punishment for people turning away from God, Elijah decreed that there would be a drought and a famine over the entire Middle East and there was. To escape the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah fled Israel to what is today southern Lebanon near Tyre and Sidon. God guided Elijah to the home of a widow. God gave her, through Elijah, a miraculous abundance of food and she in turn fed him and gave him a place to stay. While there, her only son got sick and died, and this is where our first reading begins today. It tells us that Elijah brought him back to life. This account of Elijah bringing him back to life is contrasted with the ease by which Jesus brings a person back to life with a simple command.

**HOMILY:** There was a wealthy man who decided he wasn't wealthy enough. So he called on help from the devil to obtain a newspaper for him that would give him all the news and stock quotes on a specific day one month in the future. He said to himself, "I'll be the richest man in the world with that information." Within a day or two a messenger came to his door with a newspaper dated one month ahead. Quickly turning to the business section, he was ecstatic for there before his eyes were the stock prices of all stocks one month in advance. But as he picked up the phone to start buying and selling stocks, he saw the obituary column and discovered his name was there. No matter what we have in life, without life we have nothing. Revelation (14,13) tells us the only thing we take with us are the works that we did – hopefully lots of good ones.

Jesus was moved with pity when he saw the man being carried out of the town to be buried. His pity was not so much for the man, but for his mother. In that culture, a widow was supported and cared for by her son, and this was her only son. It was equivalent to her losing all her "social security." She would have had no means of support, nothing. Because he pitied her, he restored the son to his mother.

Just to be accurate in our terminology, this was not a resurrection but a resuscitation. The resurrection will be forever. A resuscitation is temporary for perhaps many more years or perhaps for just a few more years. It is something that happens frequently these days when doctors or emergency workers bring a person back to life whose heart had stopped and they were clinically dead. A number of those people who are resuscitated have what are called "near death experiences." Most of the people who had near death experiences, saw a light they felt drawn to; sometimes they saw and talked with relatives, most (but not all) experienced a sense of peace. Reading about it some years ago greatly reinforced my belief in the next life. Those who had those experiences were left with three attitudes that pretty much stayed with them: 1) they no longer feared death, 2) they put less value on material things and 3) they appreciated and valued their loved ones a great deal more.

It would have been extremely interesting to interview the young man whom Jesus resuscitated in today's gospel to hear about his experiences on the other side. Notice Jesus didn't have to do anything special to resuscitate him except to speak the words: "I say to you, arise." The power of his word that healed the sick, calmed the sea, cast out demons also could raise the dead.

I might mention that last week we celebrated the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. Because the powerful word of Jesus that could even raise the dead also said: "this is my body, this is my blood, do this in memory of me," we believe bread and wine become Christ's body and blood.

In John 10, 10 Jesus tells us: "I came that they may have life and may have it to the full." I can hardly pass up this opportunity where the gift of life is a central theme of our readings and not say something about the trial against Dr. Kermit Gosnell less than a month ago in Philadelphia. The horrible things that went on in his abortion clinic just point out the grisly and immoral business of abortion. What he did to babies already born is so horrible in people's minds, but somehow when the same things are done to babies not yet born, it's not all that bad in the view of some people. It's hard for me to understand that so many people do not see that there is no essential difference between a baby not yet born and one that has been born. I'm grateful that God gave me life and my parents supported it and nurtured it. Amen.

### **Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – C Cycle June 16, 2013**

**INTRODUCTION:** (2 Samuel 12, 7-10.13; Galatians 2, 16.19-21; Luke 7, 36 – 8,3) King David was a great king and loved God but, like all of us, he was not perfect. Today's reading occurs shortly after he gave in to his lust for Bathsheba and got her pregnant. Then he arranged for her husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle so he could marry her and cover up his sin. Nathan, God's prophet at the time, was given the mission of confronting the king, and that's where our reading begins. The word "Lord" as used in today's reading refers to God mostly, but "lord" also refers to David's predecessor, King Saul, as when God tells David that God had given him his lord's house and his lord's wives. The theme is on forgiveness, which corresponds to the theme in the gospel.

**HOMILY:** Happy Fathers' Day to all of our fathers and grandfathers. You deserve our respect and appreciation for the care and love and sacrifice you made for your families. It was hard to find a couple of jokes for fathers' day, so I've substituted a joke about a husband (I figured that was close enough). A pastor met a woman at whose wedding he had officiated years ago. "Does your husband live up to the promises he made to you before you were married?" he asked the woman. "He sure does," she immediately answered. "While we were dating he kept saying he wasn't good enough for me, and he has been proving it ever since." (*Joyfulnoiseletter, June-July 2011 and June-July 2010*) That doesn't apply to any of the men here though. You are all wonderful people.

I could talk for several hours on today's theme of forgiveness because there are so many kinds of forgiveness. I could talk about the forgiveness we need to have in our dealings with one another, or I could talk about having to forgive ourselves. I've known people who couldn't forgive God because they thought God had let them down. Today, however we are going to talk about God's forgiveness of us because that is the theme of today's readings. God is always ready to forgive us when we repent, but we do have to repent. In today's first reading we heard David say to the prophet, "I have sinned against the Lord." He didn't blame someone else for what he did. He admitted his responsibility. The first step in repenting is honesty with God and with ourselves. Our psalm that follows the first reading is attributed to King David who prayed: "to you I have acknowledged my sin; my guilt I did not hide. I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord and you have forgiven the guilt of my sin.'" - A good expression of repentance.

I would like to turn now to our gospel. A woman with a bad reputation broke into a formal dinner and showed Jesus an overwhelming amount of gratitude and affection. A Pharisee who had invited Jesus, whose name was Simon, along with the other guests, was shocked. So Jesus told a parable about two debtors. The parable made the point that the woman's many sins had been forgiven and that was why she was so lavish in her giving thanks to Jesus, for she had been forgiven so much.

We are not told when she might have been forgiven. I would just be speculating to suggest that she may have heard Jesus preach about the mercy of God - in the parable of the lost sheep or the prodigal son, for example. Hearing his teaching on God's mercy, she may have had a conversion turning her heart to God totally. Somehow, however it came about, she knew Jesus was the agent through which she was forgiven, and she came to show her immense gratitude. (By the way, this scene is pictured in the stained glass window above the side door on the Pitt Street side of the Church.) When Jesus told her: "Your sins are forgiven," he was giving her concrete assurance that she had really been forgiven.

Time and again in the gospels Jesus said to people, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus continues to say this to us through the sacrament of reconciliation. Theologians have always taught that it is possible to be forgiven of really serious sin by making a perfect act of contrition. But mostly serious sin is forgiven through the sacraments of baptism, reconciliation and the anointing of the sick.

Even if a person is forgiven by a perfect act of sorrow, the Church does require of Catholics a firm resolution to go to sacramental confession as soon as possible. (Catholic Catechism # 1452) Why does it have this requirement - because the Church knows our perfect act of contrition may not be as perfect as we think it is. Most of us are pretty good at rationalizing and confession helps us to develop an objective and honest view of our spiritual lives.

Confession can be helpful to our spiritual growth for all of us even when we don't have anything big to confess, but it is necessary for serious sins. Theology can get kind of

heavy, and I can see some people's eyes starting to glaze over, so I will conclude with this: if you do not remember everything that I said today, or if you are confused because some points need a fuller explanation, I ask you to remember the two important attitudes that are expressed in today's two readings: 1) be honest with yourself like David in the first reading and 2) be thankful for God's mercy and forgiveness like the woman in the gospel. Amen.

**Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time – C Cycle**  
**June 23, 2013**

**INTRODUCTION:** (*Zechariah 12,10-11.13,1; Galatians 3,26-29; Luke 9,18-24*) "Christ" was not Jesus' second name. The word Christ, or Christos in Greek, means the "Anointed One." In Hebrew the word for the "Anointed One" is Messiah. The Jewish view was that the Christ would be a powerful and gifted king or a cosmic judge of the earth or a great high priest who would authentically teach God's word. As God's Anointed One, the Christ would free God's people from the control of the Romans who ruled over them through a Roman Governor (at the time of Jesus it was Pontius Pilate), whose soldiers occupied their land and to whom the Jews paid taxes. In today's gospel Peter acknowledges Jesus was the Christ of God, the one they expected to free them from Roman domination. But when Jesus predicted he would suffer, be rejected and be put to death, it was as if Jesus was speaking in Chinese. It was totally beyond the apostles' ability to comprehend. We know from Jewish history that there were many good and holy people who suffered and were put to death such as the prophets or Jewish martyrs. However, in the Jewish mentality, and in all of Jewish literature, there was never even a hint that the Christ, the Messiah, would suffer or would be put to death. The Christ or the Messiah was expected to be a glorious liberator from the Romans and he would punish the Romans for their treatment of the Jews. Today's first reading from Zechariah foretells a time when God would purify his people and his people would deeply repent over one of God's servants whom they had killed. Jerusalem's mourning and repentance would lead to their purification. The person Zechariah was speaking of has never been identified, but after the resurrection, Jesus' followers could discover a new way to understand certain Old Testament scripture passages, such as today's. They found another meaning in passages about suffering and they could see how those passages applied to and were fulfilled in Jesus. St. John's gospel specifically applies today's first reading to Jesus' being pierced by a lance as he hung on the cross. "They shall look on him whom they have pierced." (*Jn 19,37*).

**HOMILY:** I want you to see today's gospel in the context of the events that precedes it. You may already know that historically all the events (miracles and teachings) in Jesus' ministry did not happen in the exact order in which they are written. Each gospel writer structured the events that were part of Jesus' ministry in a way that suited their own purpose. One simple example is the prayer "Our Father." In Matthew we find it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the Sermon on the Mount. In Luke, we find it more toward the end of his ministry as he is making his way to Jerusalem and the apostles ask him to teach them how to pray.

I want to speak about the context of today's gospel so you can get a better sense of the ups and downs the apostles experienced day by day in following Jesus. We're not the only ones who have ups and down in our spiritual lives. You might try to imagine you were one of the apostles and imagine experiencing what they were going through. It is in chapter nine where we find today's gospel, and chapter nine begins with Jesus sending the apostles to nearby villages to cast out demons and to heal the sick, which they discovered they had the power to do because Jesus gave it to them. Then there is a piece about Herod asking the question about Jesus, "who is this about whom I hear such things?" It might make you a little nervous to have your governor or ruler start asking questions about you: "who is that guy or that woman that I'm hearing about?" (Get the FBI to check them out!) Herod's question leads into today's gospel when Jesus asks "who do people say that I am?" Immediately before Luke's gospel today, a large crowd of about 5000 men (not counting women and children) came to Jesus to hear him speak and to be healed. While they were with him, he fed them miraculously with five loaves and two fish. These are some of the exciting things that had been happening. Then, the apostles get blown away. Typical of Luke, we are told Jesus had been in prayer before he asked the apostles two important questions: who do people say I am, and most important: who do you say that I am? Peter had the answer, but Jesus told them not to tell anyone. Why? Because Peter only had part of the answer. Jesus added the part of the answer that was missing: that he would suffer, be rejected by the authorities and be killed and on the third day be raised. As I said in my introduction, there was never any hint that the long awaited savior of Israel would suffer in any way. If we had been there, we would have been as shocked as all the apostles. But wait, that's not all. Jesus warns of sufferings for those who follow him, and maybe even death. Apparently the apostles put out of their minds everything Jesus said about suffering. They were in a state of denial and expected Jesus would do those wonderful things for God's people that they always believed he would do: get rid of the Romans and restore the Kingdom of David, which was also for them the Kingdom of God, to Israel.

In hindsight, through faith in the resurrection, we now know that Jesus, our savior and Messiah will do great and wonderful things for his people, more wonderful things than we can even imagine. It was believed in the early years of the Church that after Jesus' Ascension, he would return in glory in a very short time to establish God's kingdom. When Luke was writing his gospel, however, in around the year 85 (at least 50 years after Jesus had ascended to the Father), many of Jesus' followers became discouraged and were losing faith; they were getting tired of waiting for Jesus to return. Perhaps that's why Luke's gospel tells us to take up our cross *daily* – for Luke suspected it would be a long wait. Who knew we would still be waiting 2000 years later? If we have faith in Jesus, however, we still wait for his glorious return and for the fullness and joy of God's eternal kingdom. The day of the Lord will come and those who have remained faithful will share in his glory, but because it probably won't happen tomorrow and probably not even next week, we are to take up our cross *daily (day by day)* and follow him. Amen.

**Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – C Cycle**  
**June 30, 2013**

**INTRODUCTION** - Today's gospel reading brings us to a critical point in St. Luke's gospel. St. Luke tells us at this point in his gospel that Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem. From this point on, Luke wrote that everything Jesus said or did took place while he was on his way to Jerusalem. This part of Luke's gospel is referred to as the "Journey narrative." When Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem, he knew what was ahead for him; nonetheless, he started his journey with courage and determination. He warned those who would follow him that following him would require sacrifice, and there wasn't time for second thoughts or to be indecisive.

Our first reading was chosen to correspond with the idea of total commitment to one's call. It tells about two Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha, who lived about 850 years before Christ. Elijah was getting old and his life was coming to an end. At God's command he chose Elisha to replace him. Elisha was busy farming and Elijah came up to him and placed his mantle on Elisha's shoulders. This gesture symbolized God's call – that Elisha should replace Elijah. It would be similar to my taking off my vestment and putting it over someone's shoulders. The point would be obvious. The reading tells us Elijah had 12 yoke of oxen which would indicate that Elisha must have been quite a prosperous farmer. When he sacrificed his animals and burned his equipment, he was indicating his total commitment to his vocation. He broke completely with his former way of life and did not look back.

**HOMILY** – A man rushed into the jewelry store one morning and said he needed a pair of diamond earrings right away. The clerk showed him several pairs and immediately he picked out a pair. The clerk asked if he wanted them gift wrapped. The man said, "That would be great, but make it quick. I forgot today is the anniversary of my wife and me and right now she thinks I'm taking out the trash!" (*Reader's Digest – Laughter the Best Medicine, pg 68*) Time was short for the man to get home with his wife's present. Time was short for Jesus too. He knew well what was ahead for him, and he couldn't even wait for a man to bury his father. I often wondered if the situation was such that the man's father was fairly healthy and it might have been many years before his father would die. Jesus didn't have that much time.

Our gospel today begins by telling us Jesus was determined to journey to Jerusalem. He knew what to expect when he got there. He predicted: "it is impossible that a prophet should die outside of Jerusalem." (Lk. 13,33) We heard him in last week's gospel telling his disciples that he would suffer greatly, be rejected and be killed and on the third day be raised. For the next four and a half months, every Sunday gospel will fit within St. Luke's framework of what is called Jesus' "journey narrative." His journey would take him through Samaria, which as we hear in today's gospel, was not very friendly toward the Jews. James and John wanted to punish the Samaritans who did not welcome them, but that was not Jesus' way of doing things. The Samaritans would be the losers because they rejected Jesus. Who knows how many of their sick citizens might have been healed, or how many pearls of wisdom Jesus may have left with them

if they had welcomed him. Next we have three sayings of Jesus that emphasize the attitudes that are required from those who would follow him, attitudes requiring sacrifice, sometimes sacrificing our comfort, pleasure and worldly security, sometimes having to put family obligations aside to honor our obligation to God, and always knowing we have to make time for our responsibility to obey and honor God.

This week our nation celebrates its freedom. Unfortunately, in the minds of many people today, freedom means doing whatever you want. If everyone could do whatever they wanted, there would be anarchy and not freedom. St. Paul says today, "you were called for freedom." He goes on to make sure we know freedom is not giving in to every urge or impulse we experience. Freedom is being free to do whatever you should. The freedom we fought for was the freedom to be able to live up to our responsibilities and obligations as we saw them and not as some king or queen saw them. God knows we need laws to guide us and he has given us a few. The framers of our Constitution who fought for our freedom knew we needed laws too. You may have heard the famous quote by James Madison (*Federalist 51*) who said: "if men were angels, no government would be necessary." You may not have heard the rest of it where he said: "in framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."

Among the freedoms we enjoy is freedom of religion. Our Constitution says: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." The Supreme Court has consistently held that the right to free exercise is not absolute. For example Mormons may not practice polygamy. A devotee of paganism cannot initiate human sacrifice. We live in a time where there are those who want to put more restrictions on the exercise of Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular. Just to name a few examples: a human fetus is not human enough to be guaranteed the right to life, a Catholic college like Notre Dame or Xavier is not religious enough to qualify as a religious organization in the Affordable Care Act. We are soon going to be taxed by being required to pay for birth control and for abortion inducing drugs, even though we are conscientiously opposed to them. The IRS will see to it. And what is one to make of the Supreme Court decision this week on marriage? There are many in our society who have no time for religion, who claim no religious affiliation and who consider religion useless, superstitious, antiquated, authoritarian and even harmful. As a people of faith and as a nation we believe that freedom is an unalienable right given by our Creator. As we have had to defend our freedom as a nation many times in order to preserve it, we have to defend our freedom as religious people and it is our right to do so. Amen.