

The Body and Blood of Christ - C Cycle

June 6, 2010

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

Today's first reading takes us to the Holy Land 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 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 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 known today. The language Paul uses indicates this is a tradition that is authentic and reliable. He received it from the Lord and he has 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: In the early days of our country before the Civil War, ministers on the frontier used to do a lot of traveling to preach the gospel. One particular preacher would go from place to place doing revivals. He always traveled with an assistant who did the cooking, took care of the horses, set things up for the revival, etc. One day he was going to a pretty remote area and he said to his assistant, "You've heard me preach so many times I'll bet you could give the talk tonight. I could use a little break. No one knows what I look like way out here." (You see, TV hadn't been invented yet.) His assistant agreed, so they traded attire and the assistant dressed like the preacher and vice versa. The assistant did a fabulous job and at the end asked if there were any questions. One member of the congregation asked a very difficult question about predestination. The preacher's helper knew he was in a tight spot, thought for a minute and said, "Well, sir, that's such an easy question, I'll bet my assistant can answer that for you." Things are not always as they appear to be.

Last Sunday we celebrated the Feast of the Holy Trinity - a great mystery. Today we celebrate another great mystery: the real presence of Jesus under the form of bread and wine in the Eucharist. I honestly think this mystery is more difficult for many people to accept than the mystery of the Trinity. Yet it is clearly expressed in all four gospels and in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Although the Last Supper account in John's gospel does not include the institution of the Eucharist, John's gospel gives us a much expanded teaching on the Eucharist early in his gospel right after he tells us about Jesus' miracle of feeding the multitude.

I think people have trouble believing in the Eucharist primarily because four of our five senses

report that the bread we receive and the cup we drink are still bread and wine. Our sense of hearing, however, tells us the bread and wine are no longer ordinary bread and wine. They are different after they are blessed. Our ears hear the words of Jesus: "This is my body," "this is my blood . . .do this in memory of me."

If we can believe that the Son of God could come to us as human, should it be any more difficult to believe that the Son of God could come to us as our food and drink. Things are not always as they appear to be. My story at the beginning was one example of this. Let me give you another: we might have a vitamin pill and an M&M that look exactly the same. We know, however, one has the power to help keep us healthy and the other just gives us a few calories that we probably don't need. What something looks like is not always an indication of the quality or quantity of power that is contained within it. There is power in our daily food to nourish for a short time, but the food Jesus offers has power to prepare us and nourish us for eternal glory. Jesus said in John's gospel, "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." (Jn 6, 27)

We come to Mass to be fed, for we need to feed our spirits with spiritual food as we feed our bodies with regular food. In addition to Mass there are other opportunities to be nourished spiritually here at St. Boniface, but I want to highlight one in particular. Every week we have two holy hours. Deacon Jerry usually does the one on Wednesday mornings after Mass and I usually do the one on Friday afternoon. At a holy hour we expose the Blessed Sacrament on the altar in a monstrance (a decorated vessel which allows us to see the host). The purpose of this is to help us renew our faith in Christ's presence and to offer prayers and adoration to Jesus for his presence with us in this way. We always say the rosary, part of the Divine Office, a few other prayers and then have benediction. Although we call it a holy hour it usually lasts about 50 minutes. This time of prayer can be very nourishing spiritually. Sometimes we have only a half-dozen people here. I would love to see more people come. I wish to invite you to come. I'm sure we all pray for certain things. In conclusion, I pray that today's feast may revitalize and renew in us our faith in the Eucharist and our love for Christ's presence with us. Amen.

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time - C Cycle

June 13, 2010

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 he was not perfect. Today's reading occurs shortly after he sinned seriously with Bathsheba and then arranged for her husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle. Nathan, God's prophet at the time, was given the mission of confronting the king. The word "Lord" as used in today's reading refers to God mostly, but "lord" also refers to David's predecessor, King Saul, when God tells David that God had given him his lord's house and wives.

HOMILY: I have a rather brief homily so Sister Joan (our mission spokesperson) can have some time to talk at the end of Mass. There are several themes in today's liturgy, but the one that predominates is God's forgiveness. God forgave David when he repented. Jesus forgave the sinful woman. We don't know when or under what circumstances he did; perhaps she was inspired by one of his parables or teachings. But the gist of Jesus' parable is that having been forgiven, she was immensely grateful. (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 of the forgiveness she had received, just as the words of the priest in the sacrament of penance gives us that assurance.

Many years ago a couple came to me with marriage problems. I do not remember all the details any longer, but the husband had a long list of his wife's faults. She was a good-hearted person and was willing to work on the things that bothered him, but he couldn't forgive anything she did wrong. I suggested to him that she must have forgiven him of some of his faults and that he should do the same for her. I was left speechless when he told me, "I don't have any faults." Not surprisingly, the marriage didn't survive. Simon, the Pharisee in today's gospel reminds me of that man. No wonder he showed such little love. He saw himself as perfect. The sinful woman was aware of her past sins, but she knew she had been forgiven and she knew Jesus was instrumental in her receiving forgiveness.

The message Jesus spoke as he began his ministry of preaching and healing was "The time has come! The kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins and believe this Good News!" No matter how bad we've been, if we're sorry and change our ways, God's mercy is there for us for God's mercy is always greater than our sins. Knowing this should bring us to greater love for God. If we think we're perfect, we need to take a more honest look at ourselves in the light of the gospel. Do we come before God today as in need of his mercy and grateful for it, or do we come before God like the Pharisee in today's gospel?

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time - C Cycle

June 20, 2010

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 meant the "Anointed One." In Hebrew the word for the "Anointed One" was Messiah). In all of Jewish literature before the time of Jesus, there was never a hint that the Christ would suffer and die. 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 liberate God's people and save them from the Roman occupation. In today's gospel Peter acknowledges Jesus was the Christ of God. But when Jesus predicted his suffering, his rejection and his death, it was as if Jesus was speaking in Chinese. It was totally beyond the

Apostles' ability to comprehend. We can see in Jewish history and in the Old Testament that there were many holy people who suffered and were put to death such as the prophets or kings or Jewish martyrs, but the idea of suffering and death was never mentioned in relation to the Christ. 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 look back into the Old Testament. There they found a deeper meaning in such passages as referring to the sufferings of Christ, the Messiah. 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 wish all of our fathers today a very happy father's day. A devoted father used to pray with his children and sing to them before they went to sleep - but he quit singing one evening when he heard his five year old tell his three year old "if you pretend you're asleep he'll quit singing." Devotion doesn't get much respect these days. Anyway thanks to all our fathers for their devotion and dedication. (This joke has nothing to do with Mass. I love to hear all of you sing.)

Today's gospel reminded me of the old joke when the Holy Father one day was visiting the local hospital which he would do on special occasions. By accident he got on the psych floor and walked into the room of an old man who gave him little recognition. Even as the pope tried to make a little conversation, the man ignored him. Finally the pope asked, "Do you know who I am?" The old man said "no, but if you ask the nurse at the desk, she'll tell you who you are."

When Jesus asked his Apostles: "Who do you say that I am?" it wasn't because he didn't know himself who he was. He was definitely aware who he was. His actions showed that awareness as he taught with authority, healed the sick, cast out demons, forgave sins, quieted a storm, walked on water or fed thousands of people with five barley loaves and a couple of fish. The gospels picture him as a person who is convinced he can speak and act for God, with a power that went beyond ordinary human experience. Jesus knew who he was. In today's gospel he was trying to find out if the disciples were beginning to discover who he was, if they were beginning to understand some of the things he had been trying to teach them. From the way Peter answered, it showed he was learning, but he was just at the beginning stage. So Jesus strongly insisted they not tell anyone. They had much to learn before they could start teaching others. If the Apostles couldn't understand the part about suffering and death, no one else would either, for, as I said earlier, no teaching or writing before Christ had ever connected the Christ (the Messiah) with having to suffer and die. In everyone's thinking, the Messiah would be great and powerful and victorious over all the enemies of the Jews. Jesus saw it all differently. We can't fault the Apostles for their limited understanding; all of us struggle to understand suffering, especially why good people suffer.

Then Jesus added another thought. He knew that those who would follow him would sometimes

have to risk their lives in order to be his follower. That is still true today - fortunately though not in our country at this time in history. The greatest suffering or sacrifice most of us have to deal with as followers of Christ is to keep the Commandments and to give up one hour a week to go to Mass - and many find even that too hard. What would we do if we were threatened with arrest, or confiscation of our property, or even death because we are Christians or Catholics? That's scary and none of us like to think of such things. Although there is a greater or lesser amount of sacrifice involved in following Jesus, we are guaranteed by Jesus' own words, by his resurrection, and by his gift of himself to us daily or weekly in the Eucharist that he is our savior, that he will not abandon us if we do not abandon him, and that the blessings he has prepared for us far outweigh any sacrifices we have to make in order to remain faithful to him. Amen.