

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST 11 June 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you” (Deut 8:2). With these words, Moses speaks to the people of Israel as they wait by the side of the Jordan River before their entry into the Promised Land. This special memory is about “manna” (derived from the Hebrew “manhu” – “what is it?”), the mysterious food that their ancestors did not know but that God had provided for them as they wandered in the wilderness. This manna was the “bread” that sustained them until they reached the Promised Land. Rabbis Yonatan Neril and Leo Dee note that manna is truly an ecological food, “It came down in measured portions, so the Israelites could not eat it excessively. Manna was plantlike and eaten raw, without the need for cooking that often removes essential vitamins. Manna was locally gathered, so it did not require long-distance transport and storage.”



**Gathering of the Manna,
Tissot**

The reading from Deuteronomy begins the Liturgy of the Word today, calling all of us to remember the long way in which God has led us from the time that our ancestors, the people of Israel, received nourishment in their wilderness years, to the time in which Jesus walks on Earth and shows us that he is the bread of life, to the time of our own birth, to this time. Every celebration of the Eucharist is remembering, not simply to recall the past, but remembering to nourish our present and to give us confidence as we walk into our future.

Manna, by its very name, is mysterious in its origins and even in its presentation, but there is no doubt that it gives the hungry people of Israel food through their forty years in the wilderness. God also gives the people “water flowing from the flint rock” (Deut 8:15). Moses reminds the people that, essential though food and water are, they are not enough to ensure a good life. In the Jewish tradition, manna becomes the symbol of the gift which God gives to ensure a good life, the gift of the Torah (the Jewish expression of God’s Word revealed in the first five books of the Scriptures and the way to living a full life). The Jesuit Dennis Hamm writes, “How was God’s word in the Torah like manna? The human spirit hungers for the wisdom of how to live according to the will of God, for knowing what to believe and how to act in ways that find peace with God. Torah, God’s self-revelation of God’s self and will, is therefore truly bread in the wilderness.” Water was also used as a metaphor for the Torah. In the words of the Rabbis, “Water actually stands for Torah as it is said by Isaiah 55:1, ‘Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water.’”



Jesus and his disciples would have known these traditions. It is not surprising then that, in John’s Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51). In chapter 4 of John’s Gospel, Jesus also speaks to the Samaritan woman about living water, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (Jn 4:13-14).

Prior to Vatican II, in addition to Holy Thursday, there were not one but two feasts to celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ: the Feast of Corpus Christi (the Thursday after Trinity Sunday), and the Feast of the Precious Blood (July 1). The transformed liturgy flowing from Vatican II integrated the two feasts and renamed the day the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. It also allowed the celebration to move from the Thursday after Trinity Sunday to the first Sunday after Trinity Sunday. Peru has maintained the Thursday celebration while Canada has moved to the Sunday celebration.

Many of us from older generations celebrate our first “Holy Communion” on the feast of Corpus Christi. Little did we know then that “Communion” would be at the heart of our emerging understanding of the Body and Blood of Christ today. The biblical scholar, Dianne Bergant csa, says so succinctly, “When we eat, we incorporate our food into ourselves. The opposite is true with regard to the Eucharist. When we partake of that bread, we are transformed into it.” That transformation is twofold: (i) it gives a new sense of deep incarnation – the bread and wine are the presence of the same Lord who suffered and died for us and continues to suffer with us, and (ii) it startles us into acknowledging the sacred communion of all creation, one body in which we reverence and care for one another (human and other-than-human).



The Old Testament scholar, Norman Habel, describes “deep incarnation” in this way, “Jesus Christ, the Word of God becomes incarnate in a piece of Earth, a biological unit that is interconnected with all life past and present on this planet. This God, incarnate in creation, experiences a normal biological life cycle, suffers as a human being and dies an ignominious death on a cross. This incarnate deity suffers not only for the sins humans have committed against God, but also suffers with, for and as part of creation which has become alienated because of human acts of violence.”

Ron Rolheiser omi gives us a direct link between the Jesus who continues to suffer with us and the memory we live in the Eucharist:

The only ritual that Christ asks us to repeat over and over again is the Eucharist. In it we remember him as broken, poured out, empty, heartbroken, frightened, humiliated, vulnerable, in anguish. . . It would perhaps do all of us good occasionally when we leave the Eucharist to go off as Jesus did after the first Eucharist, to a lonely place to have an agony in the garden and to sweat some blood as we ask for the strength to drink from the real chalice – the chalice of vulnerability. Occasionally when St. Augustine handed the Eucharist to a communicant, instead of saying, “the body of Christ,” he would say, “Receive what you are.”



The awareness of being one within the sacred communion of all creation is beautifully expressed in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:16-17). It is truly a “holy communion,” celebrated every time we participate in

Eucharist – the bread and water of the Word and the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

Veronica Lawson rsm teaches us what this sense of a holy communion means when the bread and wine of our Eucharistic celebrations “have become, in a very real though mysterious sense, the body and blood of Christ. While we reflect on this mystery, we ground our faith in action designed to address the issue of global hunger and the circumstances that inhibit access to ‘bread’ for all. The feast of the Body and Blood of Christ invites us to careful consumption of the world’s resources so that all God’s people and all God’s creatures may have life.” Steve Garnaas-Holmes sends the same message in a poem-prayer:

We are not separate things, but all parts of one living Being.
 We are no more separate than the fingers on a hand,
 the notes in a chord, the words in a sentence,
 the flavors in a gourmet dish, the cells in a body.
 We are part of one another; we are each other in different ways.
 There is one body, and we are all it.
 We serve the poor because they are us.
 We love the stranger because in them we know ourselves.
 We side with the oppressed because they hold our wisdom.
 We honor those who are different because they complete us.
 We respect those who horrify us, for they are within us.
 We bring the Other to our table: it is theirs, for we are theirs.
 We include them in our compassion, for we include them.
 The Christ that is in you is not separate from the Christ
 in the unclean and lepers and drug addicts and terrorists.
 Your choosing may be different, but the Spirit is One.
 You are not the One, but you are in the One.
 This is the mystery of the Holy Trinity, that in all there is One.
 There is One of us, and the oneness, the One, is Holy.



Eucharist
Sieger Köder

We conclude these reflections with this haunting prayer from the website, *Bread for the World*:

Lord, let me hunger enough that I not forget the world’s hunger.
 Lord, let me hunger enough that I may have bread to share.
 Lord, let me hunger enough that I may long for the Bread of Heaven.
 Lord, let me hunger enough that I may be filled.
 But, O Lord, let me not hunger so much
 that I seek after that which is not bread, nor try to live by bread alone. Amen.

We began our reflection with Moses’ invitation to the people of Israel to remember. On this feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, I invite each of us to remember our first Holy Communion. Let that memory nourish our living today in awareness of the wonder of deep incarnation and in gratitude for the joy of being one in the sacred communion of all creation. How blessed we are to participate in “Holy Communion” in ritual and in life!



***At the Ecological Supper
 of the Kingdom***
Cerezo Barredo cmf