

Homily for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

May 29, 2005

Deut 8:2-3, 14b-16a; I Cor 10:16-17; Jn 6:51-58

Preacher: *Sister Mary Catherine*

There is a beautiful tradition in our Dominican communities that unites us in reverencing the mystery of the Body of Christ before we begin the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. We pray, "*O sacred banquet in which Christ becomes our food, the memory of his passion is celebrated, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.*" The feast of Corpus Christi in this Year of the Eucharist presents us with a sacred moment to reflect on the great truths of the Eucharist that are expressed so profoundly in this prayer.

"*O sacred banquet in which Christ becomes our food.*" Jesus loved us so much that he desired to feed us with his very self. The night before he died, he took bread, he blessed it, and said: "Take and eat, this is my body." Then Jesus took a cup, gave thanks and praise and said, "Take this, this is the cup of my blood." In every Eucharist Jesus becomes present under the most humble appearances of bread and wine. No greater table is ever set, no greater food is ever served. Jesus teaches us this truth in today's Gospel, "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink."

Before this mystery we acclaim our faith at every Eucharist: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." The words of the memorial acclamation bring us to the next truth of our prayer and remind us that in the sacrament of the Eucharist "*the memory of Jesus' passion is celebrated.*" In the Eucharistic prayer how often we have heard these words: "In memory of his death and resurrection, we offer you, Father, this life-giving bread, this saving cup."

There is more. In the Eucharist "*the soul is filled with grace.*" In today's Gospel we hear Jesus promise us that "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." God's life, grace, fills us when we receive the Eucharist. As we prepare for communion, we humbly acknowledge that Jesus will become one with us when we pray, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you. . ." To receive Jesus is to receive his life which is grace. Jesus teaches this to us in the Gospel for this feast: "Just as the Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me."

Finally, in our prayer we affirm that in the Eucharist "*a pledge of future glory is given to us.*" Every time we gather at the table of the Eucharist, "the source and summit of the Christian life," we receive nourishment to satisfy our deepest hungers, and we confirm our deepest faith that one day we will enter into glory at the great banquet table of the kingdom of God. This is the assurance that we find in the words of today's Gospel, when Jesus instructs the crowds, "Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

The solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ that we celebrate in the Year of the Eucharist is a unique moment not simply to recite "O sacred banquet" as we begin our common prayer. This is a day to contemplate with joy-filled, Eucharistic hearts this treasured prayer, "*O sacred banquet in which Christ becomes our food, the memory of his passion is celebrated, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.*"