

Year A – Solemnity of Corpus Christi

I would like to have you use your imagination. Let's go back 2,000 to first century Israel and find ourselves in the small town of Capernaum. Now imagine that you are a Jewish man (something of a challenge for the ladies present) and that you are sitting in the local synagogue. Maybe you are talking with the other men about what had happened the other day when the teacher from Nazareth, Jesus, did something that everyone is still trying to understand. How Jesus took a couple of loaves of bread and a few fish and fed a huge crowd of men, and the women and children. You might be recalling how Moses was able to ask God to feed our ancestors in the desert with the manna. Maybe something great is about to happen, since something like this was believed to be a sign, by some, that God would send a new Moses to the people of Israel. Could this possibly be that time foretold?

You're still sitting in the synagogue and now Jesus comes in and begins to talk with the men that are gathered. Jesus is saying something about body and blood. You cannot believe what you are hearing. This Jesus is telling the men to eat his body and drink his blood. Does this Jesus think we are some kind of wild animals that we would eat another human beings flesh? Doesn't he know that drinking any kind of blood is forbidden by the Law of Moses? Maybe we misunderstood what he said. How can we take him seriously if he makes these kinds of unbelievable demands on us? Jesus even says that we can have eternal life if we eat his body and drink his blood. Who does he think he is, God?

Many who had heard Jesus talking about eating his body and drinking his blood, and been following him, would now walk away. This saying of Jesus was too hard for them to understand

and follow. Fortunately, for us, there remained with Jesus a small group of believers who came to accept what Jesus was teaching. After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, they began a practice of gathering in local houses for a meal on the first day of the week, Sunday. They would share the stories of Jesus and during the meal they would repeat the words of Jesus from his Last Supper with his disciples before his arrest: this is my body, this is my blood. They believed that in doing so that in some way, through the power of God in the Holy Spirit, Jesus would be present with them again. These house communities were the foundation of the church we have today.

Let's come back to our celebration today and think about what has happened in the church since the time of the first disciples. Over the intervening 2,000 years the church has been reflecting on the words of Jesus about eating his body and drinking his blood. We know that he was not talking about his human body and blood. On a practical level there would not be enough to go around for everyone, especially over 2,000 years.

Today we continue to celebrate the eating of the body of Jesus and drinking his blood in the Eucharist. How are the elements of the Eucharist the body and blood of Jesus? The church teaches that it is a mystery how the elements of bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus. When the church uses the word "mystery" it does not do so in the way we normally think of mystery. We think of mystery as something that needs to be solved. We think of mystery as something that is hidden within maybe a fictional story, or some type of problem whose answer we can arrive at given either enough clues or enough research. This is not the way the church uses the word mystery. When the church says that something is a mystery it means that its

complete understanding cannot be achieved because it is something that God accomplishes within himself.

When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist the one called out to lead our community, our priest, prays the Eucharistic Prayer. The priest says prayers over the bread and wine that have been brought forth by members of the community. He asks that the Holy Spirit, the third person of God, come upon the gifts, making them the body and blood of Jesus. The priest is not performing some type of magic act, but an act of faith for the gathered community. In doing so the community and the priest are following the command of Jesus to his disciples: do this in memory of me. Jesus' disciples continued this practice after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension because they truly saw the risen Jesus and believed that he was the source of eternal life for those who believed. Sharing in the Eucharistic meal for them was the means for making Jesus continually present within the community of believers.

When we come forward to receive the Eucharist the minister says "The body of Christ" and "The blood of Christ." The person receiving Eucharist responds "Amen," which means "let it be so" and this is our profession of faith in what the Eucharist has become, the body and blood of Jesus. Today, on this Solemnity of Corpus Christi, let our "Amen" state firmly that Jesus is our lord and our God who leads us to eternal life.