

MOST HOLY BODY & BLOOD OF CHRIST; Cycle – A; June 11th 2023
Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16; 1Cor 10: 16-17; John 6: 51-58

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

As you know, on Holy Thursday, at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, our main focus is on the Institution of the Eucharist which took place at the Passover Meal Jesus celebrated with his disciples. Considering the importance of Eucharist in the Catholic life, a special Feast of Corpus Christi was introduced in the Church in on Sept 8th 1264 by Pope Urban IV. Originally it was celebrated on the following Thursday after Trinity Sunday, but later it was moved to the weekend. Besides that, thousands and thousands of books are written on the Eucharist. Recently, our diocese has arranged a Eucharistic Congress to point out the importance of the Eucharist in our Catholic Faith.

According to the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, which is the early history of the Church, the only celebration the apostles together with the early Christians had, was the Eucharistic celebration. As we read in the synoptic gospels Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. But in Luke 22: 19b Jesus gives the commandment to the disciples: **“Do this in memory of me.”** In other words, Jesus expected his disciples to continue with what he has done. At the Pentecost the Church was born and the Christian community gathered together every Sunday to celebrate the Christian Sabbath and in that the apostles re-enacted the Last Supper. In Acts 2:42 we read: **“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the Breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”** The term Eucharist or Eucharistic celebration was introduced in the Church in the later period and the **‘Breaking of Bread’** was the term used for the Eucharistic celebration at that time.

In the first three centuries there were no churches for gathering; rather the faithful gathered in the private houses for the celebration of the Eucharist. Even that was badly interrupted by the severe persecution in Rome. Still the Christians gathered in their hiding places to participate in the Eucharist, even at the risk of their life. The early writings show that it was the Eucharist which gave the persecuted Christians the courage and grace to withstand the severe torture. The testimonies of some of the priests and bishops who survived the Nazi Concentration camps give us a clear indication as how they smuggled the bread and wine and celebrated the Eucharist in the prison cells and how it helped them to bear the suffering. If the Eucharistic celebration is taken away from the Catholic Church, we are reduced to nothing; for Eucharist is the power which unites us.

It is a bit disappointing to notice that the synoptic gospels which give us the account of the Institution of the Eucharist give us only a very brief account of such a

great event. But we Catholics need not grope in the darkness looking for more information about the Eucharist; rather what we need to do is to take the account of the Institution of the Eucharist in the synoptic gospels and go through the gospel of John chapter 6:35-69 which is known to be the Eucharistic discourse of Jesus. There John speaks very clearly about the Body and Blood of Jesus; how important it is for us to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus. Jesus says in John: **“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51)**. Jesus continues: **“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day” (Jn 6:53-54)**. So it is very clear that to attain eternal life, it is essential that we receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

Will anyone who receives the Body and Blood of Christ gain eternal life? If we take the letter of Paul to the 1Corinthians 11:23- 31 we know that the unworthy reception of the Eucharist is bringing not eternal life rather eternal punishment. Let us listen to the words of St. Paul, **“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying.”** In that case, we wonder, how worthily the Christmas and Easter Christians approach the Eucharist! These days, many Catholics are very careless about the Holy Communion and without any proper disposition they approach this great Sacrament. Many Catholics don't believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist any more. I humbly request you to be careful about couple things; if you are in a mortal sin, please abstain from the Communion until you make a good confession. Secondly, please don't miss a Sunday Eucharistic celebration, unless there is very grave reason. When we receive the Holy Communion not only we are filled with full grace but also receive the giver of grace who is Jesus Christ.