

This weekend we are celebrating the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, or as it has traditionally been called, Corpus Christi. This solemnity goes back to the thirteenth century and was intended to draw focus to Christ's real presence in the Eucharist at the mass and his presence among us every day when we celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy. The need to remind us of this theological truth and belief of the Catholic Church, and also the Eastern Orthodox, is as important today as it was in the thirteenth century, and as it was in the beginning where Christ revealed this teaching in Capernaum after the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish which we read about in today's gospel.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, then pope, points this out in a homily he gave in 2007 on this solemnity where he stated, "*Corpus Christi is thus a renewal of the mystery of Holy Thursday, as it were, in obedience to Jesus' invitation to proclaim from "the housetops" what he told us in secret (cf. Mt 10: 27). It was the Apostles who received the gift of the Eucharist from the Lord in the intimacy of the Last Supper, but it was destined for all, for the whole world.*"<sup>1</sup> This sacred meal which we will partake of shortly, is destined for all of mankind until the end of time.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily on Solemnity of Corpus Christi, June 7, 2007, paragraph 5

Our readings today focus primarily on Jesus' priestly nature. In our first reading we encounter a figure whose name is Melchizedek. He appears on the scene after Abram defeated armies that had captured his nephew Lot and confiscated all of his possessions. There are a couple of important things to note about Melchizedek for the reading. First, we see he is a king, from a city called Salem. Salem is the site that will eventually become the city of Jerusalem. Second, he's also a priest, but our reading makes the point to state, he is a priest of God Most High. What this is telling us is that he worships the true God. It's an interesting appearance and statement as this is the first time up to this point in scripture, someone is identified as a priest of God Most High. This would mean Melchizedek had to have been taught what it means to be a priest of God Most High. Where and who did he learn this from?

If we go back to Chapter 4 of Genesis, we get a sense that offerings to God Most High started with Adam. In this chapter we have Cain and Abel making offerings to God Most High. Therefore, in all of us, being a creature of God and created in his image, it is innate in us to worship the God Most High in some form or manner depending on our role in the worship ceremony. The pure nature of this charism was damaged in the fall, because Cain's sacrifice was for some reason incomplete in God's eyes and Abel's was not. In our baptism, each of us is anointed with

sacred chrism as a priest. This sanctifying grace helps restore the purity of this priestly charism in each of us that was damaged with the fall. We are a priestly people. More on that in a few minutes. Fast-forward to Noah. With the great flood we read in Genesis that Noah and his line are saved as righteous in the eyes of God Most High. Therefore, Melchizedek has to have ties in some way to Noah's line, whether that's directly or indirectly. Melchizedek offers sacrifice to God Most High with bread and wine in thanksgiving to Abram's victory of retrieving his nephew Lot and defeating the kings that captured him. He then blesses Abram. This sequence is important because the next chapter in Genesis we have God's covenant with Abraham.

Our Psalm reading today gives us a foreshadowing of a future ruler of Jerusalem, a king, who will also offer sacrifices in the priestly order of Melchizedek. A "king-priest." There are messianic overtones in this Psalm that point not just to temporal king, but to someone who will sit on God's right-hand and rule in the midst of his enemies. The messiah will be a king and priest. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the connection is explicitly made that Christ, as messiah, is the priest foretold that is from the order of Melchizedek and fulfills the prophesy of Psalm 110.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 5:9-10

epistle goes on to state that when there is a change in priesthood, such as the priesthood of Aaron and the old covenant to the priesthood of Melchizedek, there is a change in law.<sup>3</sup> The old covenant is now replaced with the new with Christ our messiah ruling in heaven as our king and high priest.

So why is the focus on the priestly nature of Christ up to this point so important? Because we cannot have a sacrifice to God Most High without a designated priest of God Most High. It's also important to note, that these sacrifices are not meant for the priest, but for all of us. The sacrifices of the old covenant and those of today are communal. The prophesy of our Psalm today foretells of a time when there will be no more blood sacrifices, but instead sacrifices in the order of Melchizedek, sacrifices of bread and wine.

It is understood in Jewish teachings that when the Messiah comes, all sacrifices will cease, except one, the thanksgiving sacrifice, known as the Todah, whose principle elements are bread and wine, a bloodless sacrifice. In this celebration the unleavened bread becomes a constituent part of the sacrifice. It replaces the blood of animals. The sacrifice of Melchizedek offers the same. Our Catechism speaks to this

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 7:5

where it teaches, “The Church sees in the gesture of the king-priest Melchizedek, who brought out bread and wine, a prefiguring of her own offering.”<sup>4</sup> And this is the sacrifice offered here today in our Eucharistic celebration, in the new covenant with Christ our high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Our gospel today focuses on the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish. In this miracle, we see elements of the Last Supper where Jesus takes the offering, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to feed others. This is exactly what Fr. Bui will do shortly with our offerings of bread and wine. In the gospel of St. John, this miracle is followed by the passage of the Bread of Life Discourse. Here our Lord tells the same crowds we read about in today’s gospel, “Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life.”<sup>5</sup> Christ goes on to teach that he is the living bread that has come down from heaven and the bread he gives is his flesh and whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life and will be raised up on the last day.<sup>6</sup>

This is an amazing statement but sadly today, as it was the day Jesus first revealed himself as the Bread of Life, this is a teaching that

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<sup>4</sup> CCC1333

<sup>5</sup> John 6:27

<sup>6</sup> John 6:51-55

many don't understand, have walked away from Christ and the Church, or refuse to believe this teaching. Pope Emeritus Benedict commented on this in the same homily I quoted from earlier stating, *"Precisely because this is a mysterious reality that surpasses our understanding, we must not be surprised if today too many find it hard to accept the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It cannot be otherwise...This seemed "a hard saying" and many of his disciples withdrew when they heard it. Then, as now, the Eucharist remains a "sign of contradiction" and can only be so because a God who makes himself flesh and sacrifices himself for the life of the world throws human wisdom into crisis."*<sup>7</sup>

Let us not be like the people in Capernaum or his disciples who doubted and left, but instead follow what Christ told St. Thomas in the upper room, *"...do not be unbelieving, but believe."*<sup>8</sup> Before we leave today, we will walk in procession with the blessed sacrament in the monstrance. This is our time to kneel in adoration...and as Christ passes you today...open your hearts to how much God loves you. How many times did people seek out Christ in the streets or temple to be healed? Reach out today for your healing, whether it's spiritual or physical or both. Encounter Christ's real presence in the Eucharist as he passes you

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<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily on Solmnity of Corpus Christi, June 7, 2007, paragraph 7

<sup>8</sup> John 20:27

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ  
Cycle C  
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Deacon Stuart Neck

today with joy, with love, with hope for a better life and world as many did centuries ago when they encountered Christ in the streets of Jerusalem, Galilee, Samaria, Capernaum, or in Bethsaida where we read of healings in our gospel today.

I leave you with these words from our Lord as recorded in St. Faustina's diary to think about when our Lord passes by you today where he stated, *"Now you shall consider My love in the Blessed Sacrament. Here, I am entirely yours, soul, body, and divinity, as your Bridegroom. You know what love demands: one thing only, reciprocity ..."*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Diary of St. Faustina, paragraph 1770