

I Am the Living Bread Come Down From Heaven

The Feast of Corpus Christi



I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world....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. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in Me and I in him. Just as the living 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. (John 6:48-58, New American Bible)

The solemn feast of Corpus Christi commemorating the institution of the Most Holy Eucharist was instituted in the 13th century, due largely to the advocacy of St. Juliana of Mont Cornillon. She believed honor to the Eucharist during holy Week was overshadowed by the sadness of Jesus' Passion and that the Eucharist should be honored with a separate feast of joy and thanksgiving. She had a vision of the Church as a full moon with a dark spot, which signified to her the absence of such a solemnity. A synod was called in 1246 and the feast was celebrated in her diocese the following year. Juliana died in 1258 before the feast was extended to the whole church.

Reference: www.newadvent.org

A great Eucharistic miracle occurred in the 8th century in Lanciano, Chieta, Italy when a monk saw the Sacred Host visibly changed into Flesh, except in the center where the sacramental species remained intact. Today this Host-Flesh is preserved in a silver monstrance and the Blood is kept in a crystal chalice fixed to the monstrance base displayed for veneration on the altar there. Scientific investigations confirmed the flesh and blood are human, the blood type is AB as on the Shroud of Turin, and the flesh has cardiac muscle tissue and the blood the same ratio of protein, minerals and calcium as in normal human blood. The latest tests done in 1970-71 confirm this miracle is no forgery but is real. (Reference: <http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/mir/lanciano.html>)

Another miracle occurred in 1263 in Bolsena, Italy, when a German priest doubting the Real Presence was saying the words of consecration. As he did so blood began to seep from the consecrated Host and trickle over his hands onto the altar and the corporal. Pope Urban IV was in nearby Orvieto and ordered an immediate investigation. Then the Host and corporal with the stains of blood were brought to and

enshrined in the Cathedral of Orvieto. (Reference: <http://www.inorvieto.it>) In August of 1264, Pope Urban IV issued the bull *Transiturus*, ordering the Feast of Corpus Christi extolling the love of our Savior as expressed in the Eucharist to be observed throughout the entire Church on the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday. When the Pope died that year, the feast was delayed until adopted at the General Council of Vienne in 1311. In the United States the solemnity is held on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday. St. Juliana must be smiling from heaven to see the resurgence of processions honoring this great feast. Reference: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04390b.htm>)

The Eucharist as the Paschal Sacrifice and memorial banquet are prefigured in the sacrificial rituals celebrated by the Chosen People as dictated in the Book of Leviticus for the purpose of worshipping the one true God and celebrating their Covenant with Him. They had burnt offerings, cereal or grain offerings, peace offerings, sin or purification offerings, and guilt or reparation offerings. All sacrifice, bloody or unbloody, involved a cost to the one offering it, and spoke to those essential attitudes of worship, atonement, gratitude, covenant and fellowship. The bread in the grain offering could not contain any leaven, for leaven is a bacteria and signifies sin. Nor could the bread have honey in the mixture to sweeten it, for honey changes the *real taste* of the bread. Sometimes, where blood was let, blood would be sprinkled on the altar or even on the people. And with the burnt offering, it was fire from above that consumed the gift on the altar. (Reference: Book of Leviticus and <http://www.seedbed.com/5-offerings-old-testament/>)

The Eucharist fulfills and transcends all these rituals; it is a re-presentation of Christ's bloody death, the unblemished Lamb of God slain for our sins on Calvary, made present on every altar in an unbloody, sacramental manner as a memorial feast, a wedding banquet celebrating Christ's union with His Church. At the words of consecration the bread and wine become the **Real Presence** of Christ's Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity offered for and to us to make us one Body with Him, the Bridegroom of His people. The Precious Blood poured out on Calvary and the Spirit breathed out on us brought forth the Church, which now pours out the Saving Grace of Christ over all in her Sacramental rituals that celebrate our new covenant with God. In the Eucharist we are sealed in Christ's Blood, like the homes of the people during the first Passover, to save us from eternal death. In Christ's Blood, which is the life of His Body, we celebrate ourselves as Church, Christ's living Body. Just as the grain of old was un-leavened to be free of all bacteria, so our communion bread is unleavened, for it becomes Jesus, the sinless, All-Holy One of God Whom we eat so we may become holy, too. Just as the bread of old could have no honey to change its taste, so Jesus did not sweeten nor dilute His words, which some thought were too hard: "**Unless you eat My Body and drink My Blood you shall not have life within you.**" Jesus says what he means and means what He says!

As a purification rite took place before the Jewish sacrifice, so a penitential rite takes place before the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the Eucharist Jesus the Lamb of God,

the Perfect Sacrifice, truly atones for our sins, unlike animal sacrifices which only signified atonement. Not only is Jesus the perfect sacrifice but He is the Eternal High Priest Who, as God and man, perfectly reconciles humanity to God. As the Jewish people offered their grain and peace offerings to acknowledge God's care of them, so we bring our bread and wine and monetary gifts in gratitude for God's blessings and ask Him to continue to provide our daily bread as He provided manna for His people in the desert. The word Eucharist means "thanksgiving." Our God is so gracious He has given us His own Son so we would have a perfect gift to offer back to Him to say "thank you." The moment of Jesus' saving death on the cross is fixed in an eternal presence before the Face of the Father, an endless prayer on our behalf, for in God there is no time. Every moment is a "mercy hour," for at every moment of every day the Eucharistic liturgy is being celebrated on some altar some place in the world! In the Our Father, the meal prayer Jesus taught us, we pray: **"Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."** Forgiveness is the way to peace, as Jesus reminds us: **"If you are about to offer your gift at the altar and remember your brother has something against you, go first to be reconciled, then come back and offer your gift."**

Baptism plunges us into Christ's Paschal Mystery. The Eucharist, a remembrance of the Passover Meal that delivered God's people from slavery, is our Passover that delivers us from slavery to sin so we might "pass over" into His promised glory. O how great is this mystery! This memorial meal! This perfect sacrifice! The Eucharist is truly our greatest prayer, the perfect intercessory prayer of Jesus, our only Mediator before the throne of the Father. He is our blessing cup, the wine of our joy in our valley of tears, a taste of heaven that keeps us yearning for more! He is the desire of the ages, the insatiable hunger in our hearts! When God sent Jesus into our world, He gave us His Heart, for Jesus is the Heart of the Trinity. All God desires now is that we give Him His Heart back, along with our own. Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil expressed that same idea in a 1958 letter to Father Paul Leibold, her spiritual director:

On Holy Thursday Jesus came, holding on His hands the Host and the Chalice, saying: "I am the Host of every communion. I am Life to all who partake of Me. They who do not eat Me will die, for no one can live who does not partake of Me, for I am Eternal Life. Come, beloved souls, poor sinners so dear to the Heart of your Host. Come receive Me that you may live and enjoy everlasting happiness in the Kingdom of My Father Who is your Father also. This I have obtained for you through My Body and Blood sacrificed for you on Calvary and become your Food and Drink in the Holy Mass offered constantly for you. Do not disappoint My hopes for I have waited long, oh so long for you. (All letters are copyrighted and may not be reproduced without expressed written permission.)"

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