

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Year A

June 14, 2020

Homily of Most Reverend Mario Michiaki Yamanouchi

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

"... one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Jesus, traditionally known as the Feast of Corpus Christi. This feast began to be celebrated in the city of Liege, Belgium, and was established as a feast for the entire Catholic Church by Pope Urban IV in 1264.

Through the brief commentary on the history of this feast and the meditation on today's readings of the Word of God, may we deepen a little more the meaning and importance of the Eucharist in our personal and community life.

The history of this feast

How did this feast come about in the Catholic Church? We can start with Saint Juliana de Mont Cornillon, prioress of an abbey. She had a great love for the Eucharist from her youth and longed for a special feast of the Eucharist in the Church. This desire of hers was intensified by a vision she had of the Church: She saw a full moon with a black spot on it, which meant to her the absence of this solemnity. She communicated this vision to Bishop Robert of Thourotte, and he convened a synod to consult on her message in 1246. It resulted in the first feast of Corpus Christi celebrated the following year, on Thursday after Trinity Sunday. Later, a German bishop learned about this devotion and spread it throughout present-day Germany.

In 1263, at Bolsena, located in the north from Rome

A priest celebrating Mass had doubts about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. When he broke the consecrated host, however, he saw blood coming out of it and seeping into the corporal, a cloth upon which the chalice and paten are placed during the Mass. Still today we can see the relics of the corporal and the altar stones stained with the blood in Orvieto. Pope Urban IV, moved by this miracle and the request of several bishops, established the feast of Corpus Christi as a Solemnity on Thursday after the Octave of Pentecost to extend it to the whole Church. Today in many places, including Japan, it is

celebrated on Sunday after the Holy Trinity Sunday.

St. Anthony of Padua: A Miracle of Rimini in 1227

This Eucharistic miracle, worked by St. Anthony of Padua, took place some 20 years before St. Juliana's vision of the Eucharist in the city of Rimini, about 150 km south of Padua. There St. Anthony was challenged by a man named Bonovillo to demonstrate the truth of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The oldest biography of St. Anthony, *L'Assidua*, brings the exact words with which Bonovillo challenged the saint: "Friar! I tell you before everybody: I will believe in the Eucharist if my mule, after fasting for three days, eat the Host you will offer him and not the barley I will give him." And the mule, in spite of being exhausted by fasting, bent down before the consecrated Host and rejected the barley. From that day on, Bonovillo became one of the most active collaborators of St. Anthony.

A brief commentary on God's Word today

The Book of Deuteronomy records three great and solemn speeches delivered to the Israelites by Moses before they entered the Promised Land. That's why some regard the Deuteronomy as the testament of Moses. It is his last words full of enthusiasm, compassion and deep spirituality. Moses remembers the memories of the past to give meaning to each generation.

The first verse of today's text has the word "remember". Remembering means recalling to connect with the glorious past. The past is part of the history of faith and salvation. God has not only burst into the history of this people just once but has been always with them. He has never abandoned them in their joys and sorrows. The trials suffered in the desert were necessary for them to mature, to trust and to live exclusively for God instead of depending on human support. The desert is a symbol of pure faith. Hunger with a basic and urgent need became a test to measure faith - trust in God who satisfies fully. Later, in a prosperous and consumerist society, people forgot about God. That was the moment when these speeches of Moses became fully relevant.

Moses told the people to remember: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that comes from the mouth of God". From this perspective, fasting has acquired its profound meaning. Matthew takes up this verse at the narrative of the temptations of Jesus (Mt 4:4).

In today's feast we proclaim Jesus as the true manna that God gives to humanity in the face of our hunger in the deserts we suffer today. All the other breads such as money, sex, consumerism, fame and power, do not fully satisfy the hunger of the human heart, only to leave us a greater hunger. Then Jesus comes as one of us humans and opens a new world with his word and deeds, with his Kingdom and covenant. There, no one should be in need because everything is shared with one another.

And finally, St. Paul is fully aware of the danger of division among the Christians at Corinth and exhorts the whole community to live in unity. He takes advantage of the community context of the Eucharist to make some practical applications in this regard. The key word is the "Chalice and Bread that unites us in the body of Christ". Paul insists on our responsibility for being men and women of communion, respecting and helping one another. If this is not manifested or transparent, our Eucharistic celebrations are either meaningless or a mere cold religious rite. St. Paul exhorts, teaches, communicates and insists again that "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body." And by receiving Christ in the Eucharist we all become one body.

Let us end by confessing the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic Bread and repeating the words of the centurion who answered Jesus: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come into my house, but one word from you will be enough to heal me" (Mt 8:8).

"The Body of Christ!" "AMEN!"

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE).