

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD  
IN  
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY  
Solemnity of the Most Holy Body & Blood of Christ  
June 19, 2022**

**SCRIPTURES:**

Genesis 14:18-20

Melchizedek, priest, offers bread and wine.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Jesus offers his body and blood in sacrifice.

Luke 9:11-17

Jesus satisfies all our hungers.

**READ THE SCRIPTURES:**

**Luke:**

Six times in the four Gospels, Jesus feeds the multitude. Luke places this episode in an out of the way place, reminiscent of the wilderness where God has fed the people of Israel with the manna. Five-thousand men were fed, not counting the women and children. Some have estimated this crowd at 35,000 (!) if we factor in the usual ratio of six women and children for every man. Luke surely means to convey that this is a great miracle. The 12 baskets of leftovers tell the Church today that Christ has given enough so that we will not ever run out of his gifts.

Clearly, Luke intends to give a eucharistic flavor to this scene. As in so many other instances, Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives the bread. Why do you not give them something to eat themselves? The ministry of the Church continues to be prodded by these words of Christ.

Why do we not give what we have been given? Why do some still hoard the resources of God’s earth while many go hungry every day? Why do so many Catholics still refuse to become extraordinary ministers of holy Communion when they have been given the Bread of Life in such abundance?

In Luke, Jesus is always at a meal or coming from a meal. The meal is the sign of God’s heavenly kingdom already present here on earth. Father Eugene LaVerdiere, S.S.S., said that the Church is already dining in the kingdom of God! No wonder the Catholic tradition loves a good celebration! And what is a celebration without food and drink?

This whole scene in Luke comes at the end of a “retreat period” for Jesus and his disciples. He has brought them to “an out of the way place” so that he might teach them more effectively. But they get found. The people are in so much need. There is no getting away from those who are hungry. They find us no matter where we may try to hide. Those who suffer from physical hunger will chase us down as long as we have food, no matter how little of it we have. Those who are spiritually hungry will find us because they know we have the Food that gives life everlasting. At least, they suspect we do. They are drawn to us intuitively. Can we ever refuse to feed those who come to us?

An abundance of food even in the wilderness was seen as a clear sign of God’s bounty and, eventually, came to be interpreted as a sign of the Messianic Age. God did not abandon his people when they were hungry in the desert after the Exodus. He provided leadership (Moses and Aaron), guidance (The Ten Commandments), food and drink (manna and water from the rock). The prophet Isaiah used this imagery to proclaim the coming of the Messiah (Is 25:6).

The feeding of the multitude is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels. It must have been seen as having the utmost importance for the life of the surviving communities of Jesus' followers.

But the importance of this event does not so much reside in the multiplication of loaves as in the revelation of who Jesus is. That is the miracle the Gospel writers want to communicate: Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. He possesses in himself all that is in God the Father: the ability and willingness to provide for his people.

### **Genesis:**

The mysterious figure from the memory of ancient Israel has been taken by Christian writers to refer to Christ the High Priest, with the bread and wine as a pre-figure of the Eucharist. Abraham had just won an important victory over his enemies. The Priest-King of Salem (later Jeru-salem) wants only peace and friendship with this formidable warrior. The bread and wine of appeasement will later be interpreted as a sacrificial offering. King David will use the Melchizedek image to give legitimacy to his conquest of Jerusalem and his establishment of priest-king of Judah. We see Christ as the fulfillment of all these prophetic images.

### **Corinthians:**

St. Paul does what we still do today: he hands on what he has been given. The technical word for this process in the Church is tradition, handing on. He says that he received this from the Lord. Paul uses this authoritative source statement to strengthen his admonition to the Church of Corinth. It is no ordinary bread and ordinary wine that you drink; it is a true recalling of the Lord's death until he returns. To *recall* (in Greek *anamnesis*, and the Hebrew word behind it *zakhar*) is more than mere remembering as you know the word in English. The reality is that to *remember* is to *make present what was in the past*. To remember the death of the Lord is to enter into the power of his death even now, to come to salvation.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Discuss the value of family celebrations in terms of developing and maintaining the bonds of love and unity in the family. How important have birthday celebrations been in your family when you were growing up? How important are they now? Christmas and Thanksgiving? Do you remember the food and beverages served on those occasions? What is the meaning of the birthday cake? The wedding cake? How important is it that you share food and drink with the guests who come to your home? Is there any spiritual meaning to all this?

2. Do you see any connection between the Catholic tradition of frequent celebration of the Eucharist and our love of song, dance, and good food in many Catholic families? How are these practices related to one another? Do you think that family celebrations in the home and family celebrations in the parish have anything to do with one another? Do you suppose it could be hard for people to appreciate church celebrations if they have not had the experience of joyful family celebrations?

3. Would we ever have had a law requiring attendance at Mass if our regular celebrations had in fact been great party occasions? Did you know that the Church had to pass a law making Sunday Mass an obligation when people no longer understood the language of the Mass, when the Mass had

become the exclusive work of the clergy and laypersons had become just passive spectators? What impact do you suppose a meaningless celebration of the liturgy has on people today?

## **PRAYER**

Lord feed your people always with the Bread of Life. Give us each day the Cup of Salvation. May the wheat of our everyday lives be ground into the bread that is the body of Christ. May the grapes of our suffering be fermented into the wine that brings eternal joy. Let us rejoice in the Lord always!

## **CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:**

The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is allegedly denied by a certain number of Catholics today, according to some surveys and polls. When Catholics in this country were asked if they believed that Christ was truly present in the bread and wine at Communion, some of them supposedly responded “No.” This report has troubled many of us deeply. How come we have failed to communicate this belief that lies at the very heart of the Catholic tradition? Some have suggested that perhaps the question asked needed to be a bit more nuanced: Christ is not *physically* present but *sacramentally* present. Real Presence does not mean physical presence. The Risen Christ in the Eucharist is really present but in a sacramental manner.

True, we celebrate the “memorial of the Lord’s Supper” when we offer the Eucharist. The Mass is indeed a memorial meal and a memorial sacrifice. But Christ’s presence in the meal is not a *mere memory* of his real presence at the Last Supper, or on the cross, or rising from the tomb. What the Holy Spirit makes present is really present. If it just depended on *our capacity to remember him*, then the presence might be merely a memory.

“Christ Jesus (...) is present in many ways to his Church: in his word, in his Church’s prayer, ‘where two or three are gathered in my name,’ in the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned, in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But ‘he is present...most *especially in the Eucharistic species*’” (*Catechism* #1373).

For us, it is vital that Christ be real in the Eucharist and not just an empty symbol. If we are to offer a true sacrifice when we offer the sacrifice of the Mass, then Christ must be really present in order to offer himself to the Father. If we are to communicate with the body and blood of the Lord in holy Communion, then Christ must be really present. Otherwise, we merely indulge in recalling what Christ did in the past.

Sacraments are signs of the Christ communicating God’s gifts of grace. But they are effective signs. They truly communicate what they signify. They are not empty signs.

(See: **The Catechism: #1373-1377**)

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