

FROM MASS TO MISSION: FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI B

Brian Gleeson CP

In all our Catholic churches, the main way we pray together is the Eucharist, the Mass. From start to finish, Jesus Christ is active and alive in us who are parts, indeed limbs and cells, of his risen body. The climax, the high point of our celebration, is when we receive him in Holy Communion. There he gives himself to us in love and nourishes our relationship with him. There he sets us *'aflake'* with his *'compelling love'* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #10). So, from our intimate sharing with him in communion, we are meant to go back to our homes and neighbourhoods with a new heart, a new spirit, and a new commitment. In other words, Jesus sends us out from his table to nourish others with our body and blood, i.e. with the gift of ourselves, our love, and our lives. He sends us out to bring to others a love like his, one that is unselfish, caring, forgiving, generous and constant.

At the very the end of Mass Jesus has one final word to say to us. Through our priest or deacon he commands us in these or similar words: *'Go and announce the gospel of the Lord.'* His intention is *'[that] each [of us] may go out [from his table] to do good works, praising and blessing God'* [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 2002, #90c].

We cannot, in fact, truly share the consecrated bread and wine without also sharing the daily bread of our personal and community resources of one kind or another. Communion with him is essentially defective, and even an empty sham, if we ignore or neglect him in our poor and needy sisters and brothers.

In a nutshell, our Holy Communion with Christ requires us to identify with poor, suffering, troubled and afflicted persons all over the world: Did not Vatican II say: *'The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well?'* [*The Church in the Modern World*, #1] A remarkable statement in the Passionists' *Rule and Constitutions* echoes this in a particularly challenging way: *"We are aware,"* it says, *"that the Passion of Christ continues in this world until he comes in glory; therefore we share in the joys and sorrows of our contemporaries as we journey through life towards our Father. We wish to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected; we seek to offer them comfort and to relieve the burden of their sorrow"* (#3).

Our whole Mass is a matter of remembering, celebrating and joining in Christ's wonderful work of liberating and transforming human beings. So our celebration is meant to send us out to liberate oppressed and struggling persons from all that is not of God, from all that crushes or inhibits their dignity as his sons and daughters. This is so true that until Jesus comes back to the earth at the end of time, the strongest sign of his presence and self-giving in the Eucharist is our life-style afterwards. This means a life-style of service, of binding up wounds, of reaching out to persons in need with

caring, unselfish, and generous love in all the ways, in fact, in which Jesus himself reached out to others during his days and years on earth.

The Eucharist, then, makes us a people sent out on mission, people who find in the Bread that is Christ and the wine that is Christ our nourishment and strength to reach out to others. A beautiful ecumenical document known as the Lima Statement puts it this way: *'The Eucharist is precious food for missionaries, bread and wine for pilgrims on their apostolic journey'* [*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, E26].

The truth is that shared prayer and shared life before and after prayer go together. This is particularly true of the Eucharist. For it is there that we remember, celebrate and encounter the presence and person of Jesus Christ, giving himself in love to God the Father, and giving himself in love to human beings.

So, to sum up my message to you on this Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, one of the quite special meanings of the Eucharist, but one that is too often overlooked or neglected, is that it is about *'going out to make a better world'* (Christiane Brusselmans).

bgleesoncp@gmail.com