

Corpus Christi, 2010 - Sacred Heart and St. Ann's Churches

We often hear about farewell functions and parties. The love that we have for others desires that we are physically present and united to one another, and when the time comes for children, friends and relatives to depart, we exchange gifts, signs and symbols to express our love. The day before he suffered and died Jesus also had a farewell dinner with his disciples. The gift he gave them was nothing other than his own body and blood which he entrusted to his Apostles to be offered in remembrance of him until the end of time. He gave this gift to each one of us to let us know Christ has not left us; he is really, truly and substantially present with us in the Blessed Sacrament of Eucharist.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Most Precious Body and Blood of our Lord. It is the Feast of the Holy Eucharist that talks about the Real Presence of Jesus in the bread of life (Jn. 6:51)

Scott Hahn is a former Protestant minister and now an internationally known Catholic theologian and apologist wrote his autobiography – Rome sweet Home. He describes about his journey to the Roman Catholic Faith. As a minister he always thought that the Catholic Church had greatly deviated from the Christian principles, especially as to the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. The turning point of his life was the Gospel of John 6:51. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh". He was puzzled at the reaction of some of Jesus' disciples who ceased following him because they found His teachings difficult to digest and disputed among themselves saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat'? Then Jesus repeated again, 'very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you (6:53). As a result many of His disciples stopped following Him because of his teaching about his body and blood.

Scott Hahn argued this way: if Jesus only spoke symbolically then He would have immediately called those misunderstood disciples and corrected them. But, he never does that. In fact, He affirmed it not less than six times in the same chapter that only by eating His flesh and drinking his blood we will have eternal life. Jesus is truly, really and substantially present in the Holy Eucharist. This convinced Scott Hahn of the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. He was received into the Church at Easter in 1986. On this 'Corpus Christi' Sunday we pray that the Lord may guide us to meditate on Jesus as the bread of life.

1. Jesus is the Bread of God:

Jesus said, 'very truly I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (Jn. 6:32-33) And Jesus affirmed that He is the bread that came down from heaven. He is the divine bread and is the food for the souls of God's family – his children. As God He had His being in Heaven and when He came down, He came with the power of God.

2. Jesus is the Living Bread:

Jesus said, 'I am living bread that came down from heaven'. Bread in itself is a dead thing. It requires human faculties to digest and assimilate it; it nourishes and cherishes life only because of human faculties. But Christ is a living bread and He nourishes by His own power. Manna in the desert was a dead thing; the Israelites were directed to collect only what they needed for that day, for if it were kept more than one night it would perish. But, Christ is the everlasting Bread who neither perishes nor gets old. He is ever new, ever living and ever sustaining.

I want to call your attention to one little detail in the Gospel of today that you might not have thought much about. In verse 14: Jesus says, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." This calls us to think about the communal element involved in sharing a meal with Christ present. **NO ONE ATE ALONE!** I am sure there were some who would have preferred to eat alone:

- Some had come for healing who heard about this miracle worker and were not interested in any partying.
- Some were feeling guilty who had come to hear this teacher in a search for comfort who would have appreciated not having to explain why they were out here.
- Some were grieving and would have been content to be left quietly in solitude.
- Some were just plainly shy and not all that comfortable being forced to open up to new relationships.

Those **THERE** on **THAT** day are also **HERE** on **THIS** day. Jesus tells us: "Make them sit down in groups..." **NO ONE ALONE!** When we are baptized we are baptized to be the members of God's family, the Church family. This membership in the community of faith is sustained by the communal meal we share every time we partake in the Eucharistic celebration. **NO ONE IS BAPTIZED ALONE; NO ONE ENJOYS THE LORD'S SUPPER ALONE.** The church forces us out of our isolation. Because, Jesus said, "Have them sit down in groups..." (How the early Church celebrated Eucharist – bread and wine from home – offertory procession -)

3. Jesus is the Life giving Bread:

Pope John Paul II was a great lover of the Eucharist. During one of his trips to overseas he said, 'Even if the hunger of every person were to be satisfied by the labor of his or her hands or by the generosity of others, yet the deepest hunger of man would still exist. Therefore, come to Christ. He is the Bread of Life.' Manna in the desert only satisfied the physical hunger and supported life, but it did not preserve and perpetuate life. But, Christ – our Manna – gives life to those who are dead in sin. He offers this life to all those who believe and accept Him as their savior. May we come to this Sacred table as often as we can so that we may receive Jesus who is living, divine and life giving Bread from heaven.

The Israelites, both Jews and Gentiles, know well the story of Manna in the desert. God provided the Israelites with food in the desert and this was constantly remembered. They prayed about it and they sang Psalms regarding this. Again they are in a deserted place and they are aware that Jesus is there among them. By providing food for them in the desert Jesus proved that God was among them and this God was in Jesus. A great lesson for the disciples.

Jesus not only provided them with food in the desert but he offered his body and blood as food for them. Today's feast is a reminder of this. Not only that he provides food for them but he also becomes food for them. He is the provider and the provided.