

Feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus
June 6, 7, 2015
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes

Today is the last major Feast before we go into the several months of Ordinary Time. As you know it is the Feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus, or as known in Latin, Corpus Christi. In some places it is a day of great Eucharistic Processions.

While the Feast is The Body and Blood of Jesus, the Scriptures for today's Mass are heavy with the mention of 'blood'. The gospel for today does mention both the Body and Blood of Jesus, but the other two Scriptures have strong emphasis on blood:

- Moses splashes blood on the altar and even sprinkles the people with the blood of the sacrificial animals in order to seal their Covenant with God.
- the Hebrew text states clearly that the blood of the New Covenant, the blood of Jesus, is far superior in power and effect to the blood of the animals of the Old Covenant.

The idea of blood, however, is difficult for us. While I think we do recognize the power of blood, we are often taken back and even squeamish about blood. In our time and age, blood can have a negative ring to it:

blood clots, loss of blood, murders/stabbings/war/bloodshed, blood diseases
I have relatives who died because they received bad blood when needing a transfusion due to their condition of hemophilia. On the other hand, blood is necessary for life; if we lose too much blood we die. We don't always like being around it, but we can't live without it.

Now let me get to the real matter of today's Feast and homily. I am going to risk commenting on a 'first impression'. I realize that first impressions are not always accurate, and maybe even only rarely are they accurate. But I have waited a year to comment on a first impression. What I have noticed is that not many here in the parish drink from the cup, the Blood of Christ, at Mass.

There may be many reasons for this: there has been little encouragement to do so, there has been little catechesis or teaching on the importance of receiving both the Body and the Blood of Jesus, namely the fullness of the Eucharistic sign. Jesus said clearly, "Take and drink, this is my Blood, the Blood of the New Covenant. Also, there are some who refrain for medical reasons and some who refrain because they feel it is unsanitary. I would agree that drinking from a common cup is extremely intimate, but I hope that when you have a cold etc., you do refrain so that others may continue to drink from the cup in as healthy a manner as possible. But it is the value of the fullness of the sign that I encourage you to think and pray on.

If I spend a couple of days preparing for you what I am quite sure is a special banquet, and you come to the table and only partake of the potatoes, I would be saddened. I would think, "I have put a lot of effort into this". How can they simply pass it by. Jesus gave his entire life pouring out his energy, his kindness, his teaching, and eventually his life blood for me. How wonderful is that? What keeps me from acknowledging that? What makes me walk passed the cup of His Blood?

For some it is the 'common cup'. As I mentioned, drinking from the 'common cup' is a really intimate thing. But the 'common cup' is exactly the point from the moment of our Baptism we are united to Christ as brothers and sisters. Being Christian, and particularly in the Catholic tradition, we are One Body. From this one basic teaching we derive our entire theology of community, of church, and of social justice in particular. We do not ignore the poor, we do not ignore the criminal, we do not ignore any who are different from ourselves precisely because we are One Body. And we drink from the common cup because it is the Blood of Jesus who saves us all, and because it is the most powerful and clear sign of our oneness with each other.

I offer you what might be a very stereotypical example, one that may also be loaded with my judgments and my hangups. I will leave that assessment to you. The example is a time when I just happened to notice the reception of Holy Communion during a Mass I was celebrating. It was at Queen of Peace in Waterloo. It was the Sunday afternoon 'catch-all' Mass. Two people were in line together; one seemingly right off the street (my judgment) and whom I did not know, and the second one from a higher class of society than myself (again my judgment) and whom I did know. They both received from the common cup. In other situations I have observed very similar situations when the second person in line did not drink from the cup (and again my judgment) when following someone who appeared to be 'right off the street'. That day at Queen of Peace, that did not happen, and the thought occurred to me "Yes, this is truly the community of Jesus, sharing together the Body and the Blood of Jesus." We come from different places, we live very different lives and styles of life, but when we come together for the Eucharistic, all the differences are gone. They may be noticed, but they do not matter, and they do not keep us from 'being one'.

On this Feast today, and during the coming week, give some thought to why you do drink from the common cup, or why you do not. In either case, are you aware of why you do one or the other. Do you know what it is that you are walking by? Do you know how important the Blood of Jesus is to you? Have you ever considered how partaking of the common cup at Mass can influence how you look at and how you treat others during the week? Would I be less likely to speak unkindly of you on Tuesday, if I drank from the cup behind you on Sunday?

Just some thoughts, based on a first impression, but related closely to the Feast we celebrate today.

