Friday of the Third Week of Easter

Gospel text (*Jn* 6:52-59): The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his Flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink his Blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my Flesh is true food, and my Blood is true drink. Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink his Blood, you do not have life within you.”

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Today Jesus makes three fundamental statements: that one must eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood; that without communion one cannot have life; and that this life is eternal life and is the condition for the resurrection (cf. Jn 6:53, 58). There is nothing in the Gospel as clear, as resounding, and as definitive as these statements of Jesus.

We Catholics do not always live up to the merits of the Eucharist: sometimes we try to "live" without the conditions of life outlined by Jesus, and yet, as John Paul II wrote, "the Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation."

"Eat in order to live": eat the flesh of the Son of Man in order to live like the Son of Man. This eating is called "communion." It is an "eating," and we say "eat" to make clear the need for assimilation, for identification with Jesus. We receive Communion to maintain unity: to think like Him, to speak like Him, to love like Him. We Christians needed John Paul II's Eucharistic encyclical, The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. It is a passionate encyclical: it is “fire” because the Eucharist is ardent.

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15), Jesus said on the evening of Holy Thursday. We must recover Eucharistic fervor. No other religion has a similar initiative. It is God who descends into the heart of man to establish there a mysterious relationship of love. And from

there the Church is built and takes part in the apostolic and ecclesial dynamism of the Eucharist.

We are touching the very heart of the mystery, like Thomas, who touched the wounds of the risen Christ. We Christians will have to reexamine our fidelity to the Eucharistic truth, as Christ has revealed it, and the Church proposes it to us. And we must return to experiencing "tenderness" toward the Eucharist: slow and well-executed genuflections, an increase in the number of spiritual communions... And, from the Eucharist, people will appear sacred to us, just as they are. And we will serve them with renewed tenderness.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Creator and Lord of all things, whatever their nature, he brought forth bread from the earth and changed it into his own body. Not only had he the power to do this, but he had promised it; and, as he had changed water into wine, he also changed wine into his own blood. It is the Lord’s Passover.” (Saint Gaudentius of Brescia)

- “The Eucharist remains a ‘sign of contradiction’ and can only be so because a God who makes himself flesh and sacrifices himself for the life of the world throws human wisdom into crisis.” (Benedict XVI)

- “The Lord addresses an invitation to us, urging us to receive him in the sacrament of the Eucharist: ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you’ (Jn 6:53).” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nº 1384)