

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ (A)

Gospel text (Jn 6,51-58): Jesus said to the Jewish crowds: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

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.”

“I am the living bread which has come from heaven; whoever eats of this bread will live forever”

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Today the one and only message that we must listen to and live is contained in “the bread”. Chapter 6 of St. John's Gospel refers to the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, which is followed by a Jesus' great “bread of life” discourse, a fragment of which we hear today. It is of great interest to us to understand it, not only to properly live the festivity of “Corpus Christi” and the sacrament of the Eucharist, but also to comprehend one of the central messages of John's Gospel.

There are hungry multitudes in need of bread —people without any hope whatsoever, facing death and a bottomless void, in desperate need of Jesus Christ. And God's People, believer and devotee, needs to find His real presence to go on living in Him and to attain eternal life. There are three kinds of bread, necessary to satisfy three kinds of hunger, and to obtain three experiences of fullness: the material bread, the bread represented by the person of Jesus Christ, and the Eucharistic bread.

We know Jesus Christ is the “bread of life”. Without Him we cannot possibly live: “because without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). But He Himself wanted to feed the hungry and, He made of it a fundamental evangelic must. Most surely, He thought it was a good way to reveal and affirm God's salvific love for each of us. But Jesus also wanted to become accessible to us, in the form of bread, so that we may remain in that love and thus attain life.

Above all, Jesus wanted to show us that we must seek Him and live from Him; He wanted to prove his love by feeding the hungry, offering Himself regularly in the Eucharist: “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever” (Jn 6:58). St. Augustine commented on this Gospel with daring and vivid words: "When Christ is eaten, life is eaten... If, then, you separate yourselves to the point of not taking the Body and Blood of the Lord, it is to be feared that you may die."

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“How tenderly Jesus speaks when He gives Himself to His own in Holy Communion. What could my Jesus do more than give me His Flesh for my food? No, not even God could do more nor show greater love for me.” (Saint Teresa of Calcutta)

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“Jesus, Bread of eternal life, came down from heaven and was made flesh thanks to the faith of Mary Most Holy. Let us ask Our Lady to help us rediscover the beauty of the Eucharist, to make it the centre of our life.” (Francis)

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“Holy Communion augments our union with Christ. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: ‘He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him’ (Jn 6:56). Life in Christ has its foundation in the Eucharistic banquet.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, N° 1391)