
Sunday, June 3, 2018 – The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Exodus 24:3-8 | Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18 | Hebrews 9:11-15 | Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

SPIRITUALITY OF THE READINGS

In Why are you eating somebody's body and drinking his blood? An indelicate question, but still, why?

You walk up the aisle and receive what appears to be bread and wine, but which is really Christ's Body and Blood. The Roman historian Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) described Christians as cannibals. And many of Jesus' followers simply walked away when he said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." (Jn 6:56ff)

One answer is found in the word "sacrifice." Oh not in today's meaning of the word: some item we enjoy but give up for Lent. Or as parents might say: "I sacrificed my own interests in order to raise you kids." Many meanings, but the basis is the real one.

Once upon a time, the tribes of the world tried to please whatever gods they believed in, by offering "sacrifices" to them. They wanted a better harvest, prevention of the storm, or the drought, receipt of plenty instead of starvation, victory in battle, and so on.

Why do this? It involved taking the best lamb from the herd, for example, and making it a gift for the gods by freeing it from earth. This is why sacrifice usually meant killing an offering. Sacrifice of the lamb or dove was meant to represent the best things that belonged to earth, now directed to heaven. Send the finest of earth up to paradise in order that the best of paradise could come down to earth.

Also, people ate the flesh and drank the blood of their offering. Why? So that they too could be part of the giving to

give to the gods. They became an integral portion of the sacrificial union of heaven and earth.

The desire for earth to join the gods is lodged deep in human culture and human nature. In the fullness of time, the one God gave his people at last a real connection with the One for whom they had been thirsting. He did it through sacrifice, reversing the order of the offering by sending himself to be sacrificed.

God sent the best of heaven to earth in order that the best of earth (Christ on the cross) could go up to heaven!

Christ was emphatically of the earth, and thus he achieved a perfect unity of heaven and earth in this "sacrifice." Animals could not choose to be offered, but Christ did so choose, freely, out of love, on our behalf.

Alright, what about sacramental signs? At what we call the Last Supper, he symbolized what would happen the next day when he handed over his body and blood. But he did it under the sacramental appearance of bread and wine. This was a re-presentation for all time of the bloody sacrifice on the cross, now in an unbloody form, and remaining today in every mass

So what is the answer to the question we began with? You and I eat flesh and drink blood in order to be a part of Christ's sacrifice. In order to join in the new and eternal covenant. It is our salvation and that of the world.

Let us let it in.

GLANCING THOUGHTS

The Second Reading says that the blood of Christ cleans our consciences from dead works.

Anybody who does laundry can tell you that one of the hardest stains to get out is blood. Why would anybody think you could clean things with blood?

The answer is that it depends on what you are trying to clean. The Second Reading is talking about cleaning dead works out of the conscience.

But what is a dead work?

Well, a thing that is dead just lies there, without moving. So dead works are works that don't go anywhere. And where would works be going except where the person who does the works wants them to go?

And now we have a better idea of what a dead work is, don't we? In Romans, Paul says, "I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate" (Rom 7:15). Is there anyone who doesn't understand this problem? Examples of it are easy to come by. Here's one: You set out bravely to give up smoking, and day after day you smoke.

It's not hard to see why dead works stain a conscience. Whose conscience would not feel stained by endless daily failure to do what he himself wants to do?

This is what the blood of Christ cleanses us from.

The blood is the life of a thing, Scripture says, (Deuteronomy 12:23). If in the Eucharist the blood of Christ comes into us, then Christ's life comes into us too. By his life, we are made into one body with him, one living body, with a living Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.

What we could not do on our own because our works are dead and our consciences are stained, the blood, the life, the Spirit of Christ can do in us.

When we are united with Christ through his body and blood in the Eucharist, our works live too, through him. And if our works live, then our consciences are cleansed too.

In fact, it turns out that even our dirty laundry is cleansed by the blood of Christ. The saints in heaven have made their clothes white in the blood of the lamb (Revelation 7:14).

The old Spiritual hymn is right: there is power in the blood!