

Rev. Derek Fairman

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ A

This Sunday the Church celebrates our belief in the Body and Blood of Christ, present in the Eucharist. We can see, with the eyes of faith, that the Lord's words to us are made quite real: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the world." The Eucharist is a mystery in which we can enter more deeply, and to enter more deeply, we want to share the same dispositions which the Lord possessed when He instituted the Eucharist.

The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. The virtue that lies at the basis of religion is gratitude. Some cynics would say that it is fear, but it is a deep sense of gratitude that brings us to Mass, that helps us get the most out of Mass, and fills us with a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Being grateful allows us to focus upon the positive, and we are able to see past problems, without ignoring the problems, but instead focusing on solutions. Being ungrateful means staying focused upon the negative, and complaining because reality does not meet our expectations.

A deep sense of gratitude means that we realize that we are not owed anything, but rather we owe God everything. Gratitude means that we know that we do not receive good things from God because of our pride or our sense of greatness, but out of God's generosity and goodness. Gratitude means that we can appreciate gifts for what they are: gifts. Gratitude means that we do not take things for granted, and appreciate what we have, instead of being upset at what we do not have.

If we are grateful, we can appreciate that we need to make a return for the good things that we have been given. Being ungrateful means taking without ever giving, taking advantage of things and people without a sense that kindness should be repaid. Being ungrateful means seeing no point in thanking God for what we have received, since God is apparently bound to give good things, and why thank God for doing His job?

Gratitude is a virtue, a disposition, an attitude, that can be difficult to find. Nonetheless, it is not lost. Gratitude is a virtue that we can cultivate, and find, no matter what. It need not involve losing everything, although that is the difficult way to appreciate what we have. The capacity to be grateful is always in our hearts; we just need to unlock it. If we are to enter the mystery of the Eucharist, we will need to let go of pride, of ingratitude, of arrogance, and instead come to the Lord grateful for what we have.

The Eucharist that we celebrate is also a Sacrifice. It is the One Sacrifice which the Lord Jesus made, now offered in a bloodless manner. Drawing close to the mystery means that we must appreciate the Lord's Sacrifice for us, and that we must adopt a similar spirit of sacrifice. Venerable Bishop Fulton Sheen once explained that it is inconsistent for a priest to offer the one Sacrifice upon the altar at Mass, and then live a selfish life without any sacrifice apart from Mass. There is a way in which the same is true for everyone.

Whenever the precious Blood has been tested in Eucharistic miracles, the blood type is AB positive. AB positive is the universal recipient blood type. At first, that might not make sense: should not the Lord's blood type be O negative, the universal donor, since His Blood is being given to those who receive Communion? However, we need to keep in mind that the Eucharist does not make the Body and Blood of Christ into us, which is usually what happens with food. The Eucharist makes us into the Body and Blood of Christ. We become what we consume, not the other way around. Therefore, it makes sense that the Lord's Blood is the universal recipient type, AB positive.

The point is that the Eucharist transforms us into the Lord Jesus, so that His life comes into our life. His life was a life of sacrifice for His Father. This does not mean that all are called to the priesthood or religious life, but it means that a Christian life is one of sacrifice. It means that we cannot always do whatever is in our own interests, and put our own interests first, regardless of what it might cost to others. A life hidden with God in Christ means that we must give ourselves to others, put others first, as the Lord Jesus did. Our sacrifices cannot be compared with the Lord's, but we can join in the same dedication to the Father's will.

Whenever we make sacrifices, we develop a sense of gratitude. When we put our own needs first, regardless of the inconvenience or trouble it poses for others, we have little sense of responsibility or duty, and little appreciation that we might owe something to others for their generosity. When we put others' needs first, this opens us to the responsibility we have to others for their generosity and kindness to us. Gratitude and sacrifice go together.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for all that He does for us, especially the gift of the Eucharist that we share. We ask the Lord to increase our gratitude for all that He does for us. We ask the Lord to help us make sacrifices for Him, as He made His Sacrifice for us. This Sacrifice is present to us once more in the Eucharist. We pray that through the Eucharist that we celebrate, the Lord's life will take hold in our lives.