

CORPUS CHRISTI SUNDAY – YEAR C

Gen 14:18-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Luke 9:11b-17

(Excerpts from Pope Francis – 2013 & 2016)

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23 June 2019

Brothers and sisters, first of all, our second reading is the oldest testimony we have to the words of Christ at the Last Supper. “Do this in remembrance of me”. That is, take bread, give thanks and break it; take the chalice, give thanks, and share it. Jesus gives the command to repeat this action by which he instituted the memorial of his own Passover, and in doing so gives us his Body and his Blood.

In the Gospel, Jesus says something that I always find striking: “you give them something to eat” (Lk 9:13). First of all: who are those who we must give something to eat? It is the crowd, the multitude. Jesus is in the midst of the people, he welcomes them, he speaks to them, he heals them, he shows them God’s mercy. Furthermore the people follow him and listen to him, because Jesus speaks and acts in a new way, with the authority of someone who is authentic and consistent, someone who speaks and acts with truth, someone who gives the hope that comes from God, someone who is a revelation of the Face of a God who is love.

This morning, we are the crowd of the Gospel, we too seek to follow Jesus in order to listen to him, to enter into communion with him in the Eucharist, to accompany him and in order that he accompany us. Now sometimes God asks us to do something and we wonder why and how. Faced with the needs of the crowd, the disciples’ solution was this: let each one think of himself — send the crowd away! How often do we Christians have this temptation! We do not take upon ourselves the needs of others, but dismiss them with a pious: “God help you”, or with a not so pious “good luck”, “not my problem”.

But Jesus’ solution goes in another direction, a direction that astonishes the disciples: “You give them something to eat”. Yet how could we be the ones to give a multitude something to eat? “We have no more than five loaves and two fish — unless we are to go and buy food for all these people” (Lk 9:13). However, Jesus does not despair. He looks up to heaven, blesses and breaks the bread and fish into pieces and gives them to the disciples to distribute (cf. Lk 9:16). It is a moment of deep communion: the crowd is satisfied by the word of the Lord and is now nourished by his bread of life.

This “breaking bread” became the icon, the sign for recognizing Christ and Christians. We think of the story of Emmaus: they knew him “in the breaking of the bread” (Lk 24:35). We recall the first community of Jerusalem: “They devoted themselves... to the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42). From the beginning it is the Eucharist which becomes the centre and pattern of the life of the Church. Jesus was broken; he is broken for us. And he asks us to give ourselves, to break ourselves, as it were, for others.

We think of all the saints – famous or anonymous – who have “broken” themselves, their own life, in order to “give something to eat” to their brothers and sisters. How many mothers and fathers, together with the slices of bread they provide each day on the tables of their homes, have broken their hearts to let their children grow, and grow well! How many Christians, as responsible citizens, have broken their own lives to defend the dignity of all, especially the poorest, the marginalized and those discriminated! Where do they find the strength to do this? It is in the Eucharist: in the power of the Risen Lord’s love, who today too breaks bread for us and repeats: “Do this in remembrance of me”.

This morning, we too are gathered round the table of the Lord, the table of the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which he once again gives us his Body and makes present the one sacrifice of the Cross. It is in listening to his word, in nourishing ourselves with his Body and his Blood that he moves us on from being a multitude to being a community. The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion. In Jesus’ request, “You give them something to eat”, the disciples are called “to give”, to share, the little they have: five loaves and two fish. As [the disciples] face the insufficiency of their means, the poverty of what they are able to make available, — trusting in Jesus’ words — they still get the people to sit down and distribute the loaves and fish that satisfy the crowd. And this tells us that in the Church, but also in society, the ability to make what we have, our humble capacities, available to God, for only in sharing, in giving, will our life be fruitful.

This morning, once again, the Lord distributes for us the bread that is his Body, he makes himself a gift; God makes himself close to us, in the sacrifice of the Cross he humbles himself, entering the darkness of death to give us his life which overcomes evil, selfishness and death. Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist, shares in our journey, indeed he makes himself food, the true food that sustains our life also in moments when the road becomes hard-going and obstacles slow our steps. And in the Eucharist the Lord makes us walk on his road, that of service, of sharing, of giving; and if it is shared, that little we have, that little we are, becomes riches, for the power of God comes down into our poverty to transform it.

In adoring Christ who is really present in the Eucharist, let ourselves be transformed by him. Let us pray that our participation in the Eucharist may always be an incentive: to follow the Lord every day, to be instruments of communion and to share what we are with him and with our neighbour. Our life will then be truly fruitful. Amen.