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**Reflections on the Eucharist for Corpus Christi**

On the occasion of the Feast of the Body and Blood of our Lord and the children in the parish continuing their sacramental programmes it seems opportune to share with parishioners some thoughts on the mystery of the Eucharist that lies at the heart of our Catholic faith. Pope St John Paul II taught: “It (the Eucharist) is at one and the same time a Sacrifice-Sacrament, a Communion-Sacrament, and a Presence-Sacrament.” (*Redemptor hominis* #20)

1. Eucharist as Sacrifice-Sacrament

It is clear from the New Testament that the actions of Christ on the Cross were regarded as sacrificial. St Paul also links this sacrifice with the Passover feast when he says: “For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.” (1 Cor 5: 7) The Passover meal in which the community partook of the sacrificed lamb was an extension of that sacrifice. The Eucharist meant for Paul not just an expression of solidarity and brotherhood but also a sharing in the sacrifice of Christ such that to eat meat from other sacrifices was precluded: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ… What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.” (1 Cor 10: 16, 19-21)

Christ drank the third cup, that is the “cup of blessing” at the Last Supper, however, he completed the meal from the Cross with the “cup of fulfilment” with the words: “It is finished” (John 19: 30). In this way the Last Supper finds its completion in the Cross and we too partake of the sacrifice on the Cross by our reception of Holy Communion.

At the Second Vatican Council the reform of the liturgy led to a newer and deeper understanding the four presences of Christ in the Eucharist: people, priest, Word and Sacrament. Nevertheless, this did not in any way diminish the traditional theology which sees in the Eucharist a sacrificial offering which is efficacious for both the living and the dead: “At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.” (*Sacrosanctam Concilium*, #47)

1. Eucharist as Communion-Sacrament

The comments from St Paul show us also that we not only participate in the sacrifice of Christ through the Eucharist but we are also brought into relationship with God and other. This Communion manifests Church to the world and we are sent out from it to be Church to the world. The theologian Henri de Lubac wrote: “The Eucharist makes the Church, and [in turn] the Church makes the Eucharist.” We do not somehow summon Christ through the Eucharistic celebration as if he had been somehow absent up till then. It is Christ who gathers us in the Spirit and it is Christ who feeds us with both his Word and the Sacrament. As the Bridegroom he loves, leads and nurtures the Church though this communion. Just as with other sacraments Christ baptises, confirms, forgives sins, heals ordains and blesses marriage so he brings about eh sacrificial Eucharistic feast for those who participate in his life through baptism.

1. Christ as Presence-Sacrament

The presence of Christ in the Eucharist is real in all four presences previously mentioned, nevertheless, this presence endures objectively in the Blessed Sacrament. That is why we have Eucharistic adoration and reserve the consecrated species in the tabernacle. To bow or genuflect towards the tabernacle or to make the sign of the Cross after I have received Holy Communion are all worthy things to do as they acknowledge the presence of Christ in this way.

In the Eucharist Christ is present to us as the whole of himself since he cannot be divided. His Risen Body bears no division so we receive the whole of Communion under one kind although to receive under both kinds is a fuller expression of the symbolic action.

1. Conclusion

Is it possible to exhaust the meaning of the Eucharist? I do not think so since it is the mystery of Christ himself. We need to listen again to the words of Christ: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. Just as the living father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6: 54-59) Simon Peter answered the Lord, when others who were unable to accept this teaching went away: “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6: 68-69)