

CORPUS CHRISTI - CHRIST'S ENDEARING LEGACY

This Sunday we celebrate what is really the most important legacy Jesus has given to his church for all time at the Last Supper. This is the Eucharist or Communion, the power of the priest to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. No other church has this. It is totally unique to the Catholic Church and is the hallmark that distinguishes the Church from all other faiths. The Eucharist became the Mass and it is only within the Mass that the words of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of me," are said by the priest to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. At that moment, Jesus is totally present on the altar, hiding under the appearance of bread and wine. The consecrated bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus. Jesus is God made man so that now God is present in a very special way on the Altar.

All of this demands total faith in God and in Jesus. Our senses see only bread and wine, but our faith says it is truly the body and blood of Jesus, of God made man. This is not exactly easy for one to totally believe, yet this is what Christ gave us. Perhaps the best prayer that anyone can say at that moment is, "I believe; help my unbelief," and leave it up to God to help one accept the gift Jesus has left for all of his followers. What is really behind all this is the total love that God has for all his children, every single human being ever created. They number into the billions and then some. Yet God loves each one alone. How this is possible no one can fully comprehend because it is beyond the human mind to understand fully what infinity really is. We understand the concept but how it works or perhaps that it works simply does not compute. We only have finite minds. Yet to accept the truth that God loves each individual infinitely and singly takes a leap of faith. Rather than try to analyze it all or understand it all, one should just accept it and let the love of God into their lives. Once this happens, then one will begin to experience the reality of God. Then the joy of believing can begin to influence one's life and every-thing begins to fit together, not perfectly but with the promise of what awaits each one in the next life. The joy becomes ever more real and one can begin to experience just what life can be.

In the second reading in the Mass for this feast, we hear St. Paul telling the Corinthians just what the Mass really is. It is important to understand why Paul is so definite about where the Mass came from. This short reading is Paul's way of trying to correct an abuse, or perhaps more accurately a false idea of what the Mass is. Paul had established the church in Corinth and taught them what the Mass was and just how it was to be carried out. Apparently the Corinthians were beginning to make the Mass a part of an agape meal, a sort of fellowship event and more of a party type of affair. This led to the have's and the have-not's being separated into social layers with the consequent snobbery that can so easily develop under these circumstances. To make the Mass a part of this was in fact trivializing the Mass and ultimately corrupting what Christ had given to his church, to his disciples, followers and believers. So Paul in no uncertain terms tries to bring them back to a full realization of what the Mass is and that it is something totally sacred and above all they should follow his demands.

Down through the history of the Church there have always been disagreements as to what exactly the Mass is and how exactly it should be celebrated. In all cases, the difficulties were ultimately solved and as the Church continued to grow, the Mass became more and more the

focal point of all celebrations. Today once again there is turmoil about the Mass. Ever since the Second Vatican Council gave the impression or perhaps more accurately liturgists began to proclaim that doors were now open and freedom was to be the key to a rejuvenated Church. The vernacular became the language of the Mass; the Priest now faced the people; tabernacles were moved to small chapels; and music began to dominate everything. But worst of all, no longer was it an altar; it was now a table and the impression began to grow that the Mass was a reenactment of the Last Supper rather than the Mass being a true sacrifice, a reenactment of Christ offering his life for the salvation of all mankind. Along with this was or is a concerted effort to get everyone involved so that they can leave the church feeling happy, that they are now filled with a good feeling.

For centuries the Mass was entitled the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is not a meal; it is a sharing in the redemptive work of Christ. One comes to receive communion not just to get something but rather to share and join their lives with the life of Christ and to join with Christ in offering their lives for the salvation of a world. Once one begins to understand this, that they are an intimate participant in the work of Christ, one then begins to experience true joy. Joy is something entirely different from happiness. Happiness can disappear in a second whereas joy cannot be taken away. Joy fills one's life and radiates out to others. But today so many liturgists and others want everyone to get a great feeling when attending and participating in the Mass. The result is that so much emphasis is placed on music and other various kind of actions that there is a great danger of the Mass serving the music, serving the whole ritual than the other way around. The danger is that this becomes more and more like protestant services, where everyone goes away all worked up and really feeling good like they all did something positive. All this ends up confusing many a good person along with the danger of losing the real meaning of what the Mass is and should be.

Coming up in about two years will be new translations of the books used at Mass and of the prayers all recite together with the Priest such as the Gloria and the Credo. Again, this is not something new in the Church. Translations have been reviewed and changed any number of times as scholars learn more and more of the history behind all the prayers and of the ancient languages in use so long ago. Many of the changes may seem trivial or perhaps to many, annoying. If it isn't broken, then don't fix it! That is true for many things, but when it comes to the prayer life of the church one wants it all to be as accurate and true to history as possible.

One must never forget that our Church is God's church, founded by the Son of God, Jesus Christ, God made man, along with his Apostles. The successors of the Apostles are the Bishops and the successor of Peter, the head of the Apostles, is the Pope. And watching over the Church very closely and guiding it through the many unforeseen difficulties and disasters which so regularly seem to appear out of nowhere, is the Holy Spirit. In truth, the work of redemption is the work of God, the work of the Trinity. God the Father sends his son to become a man and give his life as atonement for the sin of Adam and Eve. The Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus continues on the work of Jesus in silently guiding the Church through the pope and bishops, through priests, and most importantly through all believers who have accepted the Catholic Faith. Let not irrational fears hinder one, nor let one's anger at times hurt one. With faith, love and a good sense of humor, we will one day look back and smile.

Fr. Andy, S.J.