

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ/Father's Day

June 18, 2017 11:30 a.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

One of the qualities that distinguishes us human beings from any other creature is our ability to feel and express gratitude----to say "Thank you!" However, as every parent here knows, it's not something that comes naturally. We are all born with an innate sense that the world revolves around me and everyone/everything is there to immediately respond to my needs----so there's no natural tendency to say "thank you"-----we instinctively expect our needs to be met. So from our earliest days, parents coach their children on how to be polite---to be courteous---to remind the child constantly: "What do you say?" whether the required response at any given time is "Excuse me", "I'm sorry", or "Thank you!"

Gratitude is a "learned virtue"; but hopefully, once learned, we understand what an extremely important human and spiritual response gratitude is.

As we all know, in addition to celebrating this beautiful Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, we're also today celebrating "Father's Day". And to all our Fathers here, and to all fathers everywhere, we wish you a very Happy Father's Day! I will offer a special Prayer of Blessing for all fathers at the end of Mass today. Through all the various ways that we all will observe this important day, what Father's Day is really all about is saying "Thank You"----expressing our gratitude to all our fathers, living or deceased, for all that they have done, and continue to do, for us---their children.

In much the same way, today's Liturgical Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is all about saying: "Thank you" to God for the great Gift of God's unconditional Love for us, and Jesus' Gift of the Holy Eucharist as His way of remaining with us always.

In today's First Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, we heard Moses, speaking on behalf of God, kind of like a father reminding his children, to be grateful to God for all that God had done for them and their ancestors in bringing them out of slavery in Egypt as they were now about to enter into the Promised Land---to remember to say "Thank you.". We heard Moses say it in two different ways: "Remember" and "Do not forget" what the Lord has done. What God had done was to deliver them from sure and certain death by guiding them through their long and dangerous pilgrimage through the desert, and by feeding them through the miraculous

bread from heaven known as Manna. And so they should “remember” and “never forget” that without God, they would have been dead, and so they should say “Thank you” from the depths of their beings and, furthermore, they should show their gratitude by being and remaining God’s faithful people.

In today’s Gospel, we heard Jesus give His most profoundly important and humanly challenging “I Am” statement of all. Jesus used many “*I Am*” statements to help His disciples to understand Him and the relationship He wanted to establish with us: “*I Am the Vine; you are the Branches*”; “*I Am the Good Shepherd*”; “*I Am the Light of the World*”; “*I Am the Resurrection and the Life*”.

But today we heard Jesus say: “*I am the Living Bread come down from Heaven;...Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood remains in Me and I in him.*” From a human perspective, that’s a pretty challenging statement to understand. In fact, the very next words found in the verse following the conclusion of today’s Gospel passage are spoken by some of the disciples saying to Jesus: “*These words are too difficult to hear*”, and John said that many went away. But Jesus meant exactly what He said.

It would be on Holy Thursday night at the Last Supper that these words of Jesus would become a reality. Anticipating what He would endure the next day as His Body would be scourged, beaten, broken, crucified, and killed, and His Blood would be poured out for the remission of sins and the salvation of the world---It was the night before that Jesus took Bread---broke it---and gave it to them saying: “Take this all of you and eat of it. For this is My Body Which is given up for you”. And in the same way with the Cup of Wine: “Take this all of you and drink of it: This is the Cup of my Blood Which will be poured out for you.” And then, Jesus gave us the reason: “Do this in Memory of Me.” That was when Jesus’ statement that “*I Am the Living Bread come down from Heaven*” became the Gift of the Eucharist given for us, and for all, as Jesus’ way of remaining with us and all the Church for all time.

As we know, the very word “Eucharist” means “Thanksgiving”. It is Jesus’ act of Thanksgiving to the Father, and it is our way of expressing our deep “Gratitude” for all that Jesus has done to bring us salvation, and to remain with us in the intimate and spiritually nourishing Gift of the Eucharist to be our spiritual Food and Drink.

And so today we rejoice in this most special Gift of the Blessed Sacrament---the Body and Blood of Christ---our most important way to say “Thank you”.

But this “Food for the Journey” is not just given to me and you individually; it’s given to us as a community of faith, and it is intended to accomplish what it is that we normally call it, that is, Holy Communion. We talk about receiving Holy Communion. But we not only “receive communion”, but we enter into that “holy communion”; and that “holy communion” is not just between me and Jesus, but it’s about the relationship that we all share as a Family of Faith. And just as that “holy communion” is to deepen our relationship with Jesus, it is also to strengthen the bonds among us---to help us to live together as brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, as St. Paul reminded us in today’s Second Reading.

Furthermore, this Holy Communion---the Gift of the Eucharist--- is to equip us, that is, strengthen us, to go forth and BE Christ to those in need.

Just as in our human lives, we don’t just eat breakfast, lunch and dinner so that we can sit around all day doing nothing, but rather so that we can go forth with the strength/energy to fulfill our responsibilities; so too, the Eucharist is not just given to us to make us feel spiritually blessed, but rather it is our spiritual Food and Drink to give us the strength to fulfill our responsibilities of bringing the Love of Jesus to everyone we meet.

Pope Francis said so beautifully in his Angelus address just a few hours ago in Rome: “In the Eucharist, Jesus accompanies us pilgrims to nourish faith, hope and charity in us; to comfort us in our trials; and to support us in our commitment to justice and peace.”

Today’s Feast celebrates something unique to us as Catholics---the Holy Eucharist. As Pope St. John Paul II told us, the Eucharist is the “source and summit of our Faith”. And that is why we are “obliged” to come to Mass every Sunday, precisely so that we can stay connected to our Loving God as People of Faith, and so that we can be nourished by the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

And so, as we celebrate this special and solemn Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ today, our hearts are filled with these two important spiritual realities: Gratitude---saying “Thank You” for all God’s blessings; Communion---through the precious Gift of the Eucharist, enjoying “communion” with the God of the Universe Who makes Himself Present to each of us; and growing in “communion” with us as we accompany one another on the Journey of Faith.

May we continue to show our Gratitude to God by faithfully and fervently participating in the Eucharist as frequently as possible. May we continue to say “Thank You” to God by living our lives in the Love of Christ through the Eucharist all the days of our lives, until we reach the

Promised Land of Heaven when our Journey of Faith in this world has been successfully completed.

God bless you now and always!

Bishop Paul J. Bradley