

Homily Corpus Christi – Year B (Homily 02)*
“The Eucharist, Eternal Covenant”
(Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26)

Two words echo through today’s readings: covenant and blood.

These words invite us to renew our own covenant relationship with God during this Eucharistic celebration.

A covenant is a special kind of agreement or bond, far more profound and deeper than a contract. A contract, when broken by one party, does not bind the other. A covenant, however, is a binding commitment by both parties to be faithful to the relationship no matter what the other party does.

God does not make contracts. God has always related to humanity through covenants, beginning with Noah, continuing with Abraham and reaching a high point with Moses. In the first reading today we are told once again of that remarkable covenant with Moses at Mt. Sinai.

There the words of the Law, the Ten Commandments, were proclaimed and the people promised to be obedient to them. Oxen were sacrificed and their blood dashed on the altar and on the people to seal that covenant. It was a covenant sealed by the lives and the blood of oxen given as an offering of well being to the Lord.

The second reading introduces a new kind of covenant. This covenant was established by Jesus as a High Priest who went into the Holy Place not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining our eternal redemption. This is not just about appropriate behavior before God. This is about sharing in the promise of an eternal inheritance, the very life of God. In this way Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant.

In the Gospel, we see Jesus liturgically enacting what he would do the next day, offer his body and his very life on the cross as the bloody sacrifice that would obtain for us freedom from sin, death and evil, and open up for us the way to share in that eternal life of God. Taking bread and blessing it, he called it his Body given for the Church. Taking wine and blessing it, he called it his blood, the blood of a new and eternal covenant that would be shed for all humanity.

In every celebration of the Eucharist, this covenant is renewed. When we share in the body and blood of Christ we renew our promise not just to be faithful to God’s Word, as did the people of the covenant with Moses. We renew our commitment to live as members of Christ’s body, members of the new people of God, set free from sin by baptism and the Body and Blood of Christ.

Jean Vanier, founder of the L’Arche community movement, links covenant, communion and the Eucharist when speaking about the life of his communities. In the L’Arche homes for the

mentally challenged, professionals and volunteers don't just work for the residents. They covenant to live with them, to form community with them, to enter into friendship with the mentally challenged who in society are so often neglected and dismissed. Through this community experience of love, acceptance, affirmation and celebration, the mentally challenged realize their hidden potential and blossom. Often, the unconditional love of the mentally challenged for those who care for them surprisingly teaches them how to be more fully human as volunteers and professionals. It is a mutually healing and freeing experience of communion in the Lord.

For Jean, the Eucharist is God's effort to covenant with us, to live among us, to love us, to invite us into communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is the least and the lowly who understand this best. Jean tells of an incident in which a young boy with a handicap was making his first communion in a church in Paris. After the Eucharist, there was a family gathering. The uncle, who was also the child's godparent, told the mother, "What a beautiful liturgy; how sad that he didn't understand a thing."

The child heard these words and his eyes filled with tears. He said to his mother, "Don't worry, Mom, Jesus loves me just as I am." The child had a wisdom that this uncle didn't yet attain, that the Eucharist is a gift from God par excellence. That child is a witness that the handicapped person, sometimes very seriously handicapped, finds life, strength and consolation in and through communion with Jesus in the Eucharist. And Jean asks, is there not a cry for communion with Jesus in the Eucharist in the desire of all people for a communion of hearts?

To share in the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God is an awesome and privileged act. It is also a commitment to live within the reign of God as a people redeemed and willing to share with others the Good News of our redemption.

May our celebration of the Eucharist today renew our covenant relationship with God and empower us to love others and all of God's creation as God has loved us in Christ.

Homily Corpus Christi – Year B
“Living The Eucharist”
(Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26)

It was mealtime on Calm air. "Would you like dinner?" the flight attendant asked a passenger. "What are my choices?" he asked. "Yes or no," she replied.

How long has it been since you have eaten home made bread fresh from the oven?

Eat the bread, but Live the Eucharist!

On this feast of Corpus Christ, the Body and Blood of Jesus, here is a story about bread that touches on the meaning of this day.

Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of WWII. He was adored by many New Yorkers who took to calling him the "Little Flower," because he was so short and always wore a carnation in his lapel. He was a colorful character -- he rode the New York City fire trucks, raided city "speakeasies" with the police department, took entire orphanages to baseball games, and when the New York newspapers went on strike, he got on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids.

One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a real bad neighborhood, your Honor," the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson."

LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail." But even as he pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous hat, saying, "Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered woman who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. Fifty cents of that amount was contributed by the grocery store owner himself, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

Someone beautifully said, "Sympathy sees and says, 'I'm sorry.' Compassion sees and says, 'I'll help.' When we learn the difference, we can make a difference through our actions.

The gospel for today's feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus, formerly called Corpus Christi, very clearly outlines four distinct actions on the part of Jesus as he celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples, and instituted the Eucharist that is the core of our Catholic faith.

Jesus *took* bread, *blessed* it, *broke* it, and *gave* it to his apostles to eat. Bread taken, blessed, broken and shared, are the Eucharistic actions that we are called to not just celebrate, but live, in our lives today.

First, Jesus took the bread. In baptism, Jesus takes us to himself, chooses us to be his disciples, his Body, the Church here on earth. We have been chosen by Christ himself.

Jesus blessed the bread. To bless someone or something is to acknowledge its value, to speak well of someone, to make it very special. In his love for us, Jesus prays for us, holds us up to the Father, speaks well of us to the Father, desires the fullness of life for us. As we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus blesses us.

Then Jesus broke the bread. It is our brokenness that Jesus wants, not our self-reliance nor our perfection. Jesus is most at home in the weak, the vulnerable, the marginalized. The way he was in the world then, is where he is most easily found today.

Jesus accepts us as we are, and believes in whom we can become. All we have to do is be humble, honest, open and transparent with him, and let him come into our lives to redeem us and to heal us. That can and should happen at every celebration of the Eucharist. That is why we pray, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come unto me. Say but the word, and my soul shall be healed."

Lastly, Jesus gave the bread and the wine to his disciples to eat and drink, declaring that this was his body and his blood, broken and shared for us. They were to eat this food of eternal life, and be empowered to go out and live it – to be bread for the world. They were to be like the disciples at Emmaus who recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, realized that their hearts were burning within them as he explained the scriptures to them, were transformed, and found the courage to return to Jerusalem to share the Good News of his resurrection with the others.

This miracle of transforming love happens through the prayer of the celebrant and the faith community, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Just before the words of consecration, the presider prays that the power of the Holy Spirit come upon these gifts to transform them into the body and blood of Jesus the Lord.

What is happening here is very similar to what happened at Jesus' birth, the Incarnation. There, heaven and earth met. The divine Word was made Flesh in a baby born of Mary. Spirit and Love were enfleshed. Matter and Spirit came together. One saint put it this way: "The divinity of Christ was the face of God before humans, and the

humanity of Jesus is the face of humans before God.” Just as happened at his birth, now after his death and resurrection, earth and heaven are linked, joined together again. Bread and wine from the earth, through the power of the Spirit of Jesus, become food from heaven. He was born in a manger, where animals eat; died on the wood of the cross, as a criminal, and now is found on the wood of the altar, a liturgical table, as food for the world.

The purpose of all this is to build up the Kingdom of God. The reign of God was the main focus of the preaching and teaching of Jesus. It was what he came to initiate – to make it possible for us to experience a bit of heaven here on earth. The reign of God is the peace, love and joy of the Holy Spirit, as well as a right relationship with God, others, ourselves and all of God’s creation. That is what we are meant to experience, and to live, all the days of our lives.

The early Church was born by the gift of the Holy Spirit on the apostles that transformed them into the Church, the Body of Christ here on earth. They were filled with the Spirit and sent to proclaim the Good News of a new way of life possible through that Spirit, and nourished by the Eucharist.

Candidates for confirmation, it is that same Spirit that you are receiving in fullness today. It is that same Church into which you are being fully initiated. And it is that same Eucharist that you are being asked to live. As you eat this holy bread and drink from this sacred cup, know what you are doing, and who you are – the beloved of God called to be his Body here on earth.

Just as the Spirit empowered the early disciples of Jesus to go out and spread the message throughout the world, so the Spirit is calling some of you today to be spiritual leaders, perhaps even priests who can celebrate the Eucharist with you people. Perhaps the Spirit is calling young men and women gathered here to be religious brothers or sisters, to consecrate themselves to the service of God’s people. It is a life like no other – think about it and be open, and parents, encourage your youth to respond to this special call of God.

The Eucharist, and the feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus that we celebrate today, is a miracle of faith. Through the power of the Spirit, bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, and we who receive it are empowered by that same Spirit to go out and make a little piece of heaven happen here on earth, by living the Eucharist in our lives.

So: Eat the bread, but live the Eucharist!

