

Dear friends in Christ,

As we enter into these beautiful weeks of Summer, I want to invite us to get to know our new Pope, Pope Leo XIV. Over the next few weeks, while I am away on vacation. I will be sharing some excerpts from homilies which he has given over the last number of weeks. Today, I offer some portions of his homily for the great Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord:

Dear brothers and sisters, it is wonderful to be in the presence of Jesus. The Gospel passage we just heard attests to this; it recounts how the crowds spent long hours listening to him speak about the Kingdom of God and seeing him heal the sick (cf. Lk 9:11). Jesus' compassion for the suffering shows us the loving closeness of God, who comes into our world to save us. Where God reigns, we are set free from all evil. Yet even for those who accept the good news brought by Jesus, the hour of trial comes. In that deserted place, where the crowds were listening to the Master, evening fell and there was nothing to eat (cf. v. 12). The hunger of the people and the setting of the sun speak to us of a limit that looms over the world and every creature: the day ends, as does the life of every human being. At that hour of need and of gathering shadows, Jesus remains present in our midst.

Precisely when the day is ending and hunger sets in, as the Apostles themselves ask him to dismiss the crowds, Christ surprises us with his mercy. He feels compassion for those who are hungry and he invites his disciples to provide for them. Hunger is not foreign to the preaching of the Kingdom and the message of salvation. On the contrary, it speaks to us of our relationship with God. At the same time, five loaves and two fish seem completely inadequate to feed the people. The disciples' calculations, apparently so reasonable, reveal their lack of faith. For where the Lord is present, we find all that we need to give strength and meaning to our lives. Jesus responds to the appeal of hunger with the sign of sharing: he raises his eyes, recites the blessing, breaks the bread, and feeds all present (cf. v. 16). The Lord's actions are not some complicated magical rite; they simply show his gratitude to the Father, his filial prayer and the fraternal communion sustained by the Holy Spirit. Jesus multiplies the loaves and the fish by sharing what is available. As a result, there is enough for everyone. In fact, more than enough. After all had eaten their fill, twelve baskets-full were gathered up (cf. v. 17).

That is how Jesus satisfies the hunger of the crowd: he does what God does, and he teaches us to do the same.

Today, in place of the crowds mentioned in the Gospel, entire peoples are suffering more as a result of the greed of others than from their own hunger. In stark contrast to the dire poverty of many, the amassing of wealth by a few is the sign of an arrogant indifference that produces pain and injustice. Rather than sharing, it squanders the fruits of the earth and human labor. Especially in this Jubilee Year, the Lord's example is a yardstick that should guide our actions and our service: we are called to share our bread, to multiply hope and to proclaim the coming of God's Kingdom.

In saving the crowds from hunger, Jesus proclaims that he will save everyone from death. That is the mystery of faith, which we celebrate in the sacrament of the Eucharist. For just as hunger is a sign of our radical needs in this life, so breaking bread is a sign of God's gift of salvation.

*Dear friends, Christ is God's answer to our human hunger, because his Body is the bread of eternal life: Take this and eat of it, all of you! Jesus' invitation reflects our daily experience: in order to remain alive, we need to nourish ourselves with life, drawing it from plants and animals. Yet eating something dead reminds us that we too, no matter how much we eat, will one day die. On the other hand, when we partake of Jesus, the living and true Bread, we live for him. By offering himself completely, the crucified and risen Lord delivers himself into our hands, and we realize that we were made to partake of God. Our hungry nature bears the mark of a need that is satisfied by the grace of the Eucharist. As Saint Augustine writes, Christ is truly "panis qui reficit, et non deficit; panis qui sumi potest, consumi non potest" (Serm. 130, 2): he is bread that restores and does not run short; bread that can be eaten but not exhausted. The Eucharist, in fact, is the true, real, and substantial presence of the Savior (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1413), who transforms bread into himself in order to transform us into himself. Living and life-giving, the Corpus Domini makes us, the Church herself, the Body of the Lord. **POPE LEO XIV***

WE WELCOME FR MICHAEL WILLIAMS, SJ

This week we welcome Fr. Michael Williams, SJ who will be helping out for a few weeks while I am on vacation and when Fr. Raphael is away in India in August. He is a professor of English at Spring Hill College in Alabama. He has helped out in the summer in a number of parishes in our Archdiocese. We are very happy to have him with us. Please join me in welcoming him warmly.

Blessings on your week!

Fr. Johnson