

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (A) **A Foretaste of Heaven**

Deuteronomy 8:2-3,14b-16a; Psalm 147:12-13,14-15,19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Sequence; John 6:51-58

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is the solemnity of the source and summit of our Christian life, the Holy Eucharist,
the food of our journey to eternal destiny!

When we are asked, "Where is heaven?" We usually point our fingers upward. When we point down, it means hell. Yes, heaven is above. In God's time and by his grace, we will one day ascend to the place where we will join the angels, the blessed ones, martyrs, and saints. As baptized Christians, we know it is our true home and true citizenship. Our Lord Jesus called it "my Father's house, where there are many dwelling places" (Jn. 14:3-4).

But when we think of heaven, we often imagine it as the end of everything on earth, which is true. How about tasting and seeing heaven here and now? If given the chance, would you wish you could visit heaven for even a moment?

Do you realize that the Holy Mass is a meeting of heaven on earth? Whenever we come to celebrate the Holy Mass, we have a foretaste of heaven. It is heaven because the center of our celebration is God, not ourselves. God invites and gathers us to his Sacred Liturgy. God wants us and our families to come and relish the gift he offers while we are still on our pilgrimage.

The people in the Old Testament experienced only a prefiguration of this gift when God provided them with manna during their journey to the promised land. This food, called manna, was unknown to them and was not merely to feed them but to lead them to believe and understand that "not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8:3). We have the privilege of receiving the true bread from heaven, made known to us by our Lord Jesus. God gives us a place where heaven and earth meet. Heaven comes to us.

In his poetic sequence for Corpus Christi, St. Thomas invokes: "O Jesus, Bread of Angels, make us see your Good in the land of the living. You who feed us here, make us there (heaven) the intimate companions of the saints." He affirms the truth that we are celebrating our communion with heaven and the saints, and our place among the heavenly hosts. We join them in singing: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory! Hossana in the highest!"

We are not merely visitors of heaven. We are destined to be the "kama'aina" of heaven! In this most holy sacrament, the Lord gives us Himself as a "foretaste" of heaven's eternal joys and unites us with the faithful on earth and in heaven. Our patron, St. Therese, was deeply moved by this truth. She wrote in her diary about her beautiful experience of her first Holy Communion. She said, "Wasn't Heaven itself in my soul?" Because her saintly mother was in heaven, she added, "In receiving Jesus' visit, I also received Mamma's. She blessed me and rejoiced at my happiness."

What a profound truth of our faith! What a consolation for us! When we devoutly receive the Lord in the Holy Eucharist, we are brought into close union with Jesus and with our loved ones who have passed away. But how can this simple, thin, white bread, so small and delicate that it can't even be seen from afar, be the source of communion with heaven and earth? Because Jesus himself is hidden from our senses under the appearance of bread and wine, he is present in this simple, humble form, which becomes his Body and Blood during the consecration. More often than not, God reveals

himself not in thunder and lightning or grandeur, but in a small voice or an innocent appearance, drawing our faith (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-12).

Our Lord Jesus' presence in the Holy Eucharist is not something we can know through our senses but only by the gift of faith (cf. CCC #1381). We are to believe his declaration and promise to us.

We hear his words in the Gospel, where he says, "I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world" (Jn. 6:51). Notice that those who listened reacted strongly; they grumbled. They complained, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (6:52). Such a reaction is natural because eating flesh and blood is forbidden for the Jews.

But Jesus did not retract his words, nor did he say they were merely a figure of speech or metaphor. Instead, he further declared: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day" (6:53-54). Jesus clearly invites us to feed on him! St. Cyril of Jerusalem said, "Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Savior in faith, for since he is the truth, he cannot lie."

If Jesus said, "If you don't eat my flesh and drink my blood, you don't have life within you," I can't imagine being distant from the Holy Eucharist. What kind of life would it be? I could surround myself with earthly bread, like gadgets, parties, and worldly allurements, but when the lights of the world go out, such a life is empty. But if we feed on his Body and Blood, he promises true nourishment for our lives here and now. He assures us of eternal life if we live his way, truth, and life, and promises to raise us with him on the last day if we remain in him.

To prepare ourselves for heaven is to encounter heaven now in the Holy Eucharist. It is our Lord Jesus who comes to us, and it is he whom we receive.

Would you take his offer of true life for granted?
Would you allow yourself to miss this encounter with heaven?

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