

6.7.26

Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

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Today as we celebrate the solemn feast of the Body and blood of the lord we do what we do every Sunday, and next Friday we will celebrate the feast of the sacred heart of Jesus. The church gathers to listen, to pray, to share, to commune, to be transformed. Because we do this Sunday after Sunday, week after week, year after year, and because we are human beings whose lives are filled with routines and also obligations, sometimes our minds wander, or we get lost in a distraction that lasts a perhaps a moment, perhaps for the length of a dull homily. Yet here we are, nonetheless, because we know that something important is happening, something we need to be reminded of, something we need to take in.

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What do we take in each day? Our first intake, if you will, as cells divide and form into a being, is our mother's blood, which nourishes us and gives us strength. When time is fulfilled, we come forth from that warm dark nourishing place into a bright cold and startling world, and our first action is to gasp for breath. Welcome to this world. Take a deep breath: you'll need it to get through all that's to come. The cord is cut and tied, air and milk from a breast or bottle is generously provided that becomes flesh and blood. Our flesh and blood. We eat and drink, and what we eat and drink in a real way becomes us.

We take in a lot more: sounds become words that become meaning; awkwardness fed by practice becomes skill, a sense of self emerges, and most importantly a sense of others as well, others who feed us physically and emotionally. Love nourishes us, makes us who we are, becomes our flesh, becomes our blood, gives life. That love creates our hearts.

And under it all, we share a sense of wonder. We take in the eternal questions of how and why. Mystery grows: the mystery of my own incompleteness compared to the magnificence of the universe, the mystery of my own inability to explain where we have come from and our fear about where we are going. We are challenged by those questions even as we are nourished by them as much as by food and water and air.

We gather here because we have been nourished with the story of our creation and our creator; of an infinite being, generous and powerful, who wants, desires, dare we say needs to communicate with us; to communicate the splendor of love and life and sharing. That's a fearful thing for us to face. Our ancestors, we're told, poured out the blood on unblemished animals on altar and on the people, marking a covenant, a promise of union and faithfulness, made and given and received and sealed. A moment of appeasement, and of union. A sacrifice. Yet not enough.

Our ancestors were weak, and we are weak. And selfish. Unable to accept the offer of union and communion fully, we fell back into our selves, out of the mystery and into the mundane, from innocence to idolatry and egotism. Not enough to life in harmony, in thanksgiving.

The core of our faith is that God never gives up on us, never ceases to nourish us. Because we couldn't be nourished by word alone, God's word became flesh, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, bone of our bone. Heart of our heart. God's incarnate son Jesus is God's skin in the game. And he showed us how to live, to live as gift, as life-giving gift, showed us through the hardest, truest gift of all: giving his life for us. Greater love has no one than this, to give one's life for one's friends.

Yet before he went to his betrayal, to his bloody death, he sat at table with his friends, and made one last transforming gift: He acknowledged our hunger and thirst, our need and our insufficiency, and gave himself to us as our food and drink, sharing his body and blood as the everlasting sign of God's union and communion with us. We become what we receive here: flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood. We become his hands empowered to heal, we accept and become his heart ever broken, ever renewed in God's spirit of life. His heart, opened fully, finally on the cross, becomes our heart.

In the power of the spirit, Jesus became what we are so that we can become living witnesses to the God as Creator, Savior, and Consoler. In the power of the spirit, the

simplest signs of our life, bread that makes us strong and wine that makes us glad, become his real presence, his real life that we share in faith and hope. And we become what we receive.

When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the life-giving death of the Lord until he comes again, and until he comes, we too are called to be his body and blood poured out for the life of the world, to nourish, to heal, to reconcile, and to make whole.

So take that in, sisters and brothers, and become what you receive. Take and eat. Become his body and blood, given for you, given for the life of the world. Become his heart with which he continues to love the world.