

The Body and Blood of Christ (C)
(Genesis 14:18-20 / Luke 9:11-17)
29.05.2016
The Sacrament and the Church

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “the Eucharist is the sum and the summary of our faith” (n. 1327). Quoting the 2nd Vatican Council, the Catechism reminds us that “the other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented towards it” (*PO* 5 quoted in n. 1324).

The way Christians honour the Eucharist is manifold and has changed many times over the centuries, depending on cultures, local history and traditions.

In our Latin rite, before the 2nd Vatican Council, the emphasis was very much on the Consecrated Host. The Sacrament was rarely received, but always seen, shown, exposed and adored. The communicant had to kneel and to receive the Sacrament on the tongue. Today while the respect with which we surround the Sacrament is commendable, while adoration is an essential aspect of the Eucharistic mystery, all this is not sufficient.

One problem is that it can lead to a very individualistic relationship with the Sacrament. Unfortunately this problem has not completely disappeared, many still today – priests and lay people – celebrate the Eucharist as a personal devotion and not as a community act of worship.

For the New Testament and the first Christians, the most appropriate way to respect and honour the Consecrated Host was not by exposing and venerating it, it was not by buying golden monstrances or richly decorated vestments, but by caring for one another as members of the one Body of Christ.

In the *Didascalia*, a Christian text written in the 3rd century, we read that during the liturgy in the church “if a poor man or woman comes to you, especially if they are old, and there is no room, the deacon shall find a place for them, O bishop even if you yourself must sit on the ground.

You must not make distinctions between persons, if you want your service to please God” (quoted in Aquilina, p. 114-115). Maybe if we want our Service to please God, we may have to focus our attention on what the Sacrament is really about: love for one another and unity with God and with one another.

To care for the poor, the sick and the outcast, to welcome migrants, to work for reconciliation in our families and communities and between our communities are not good works to be accomplished only during Lent and then forgotten the rest of the year. They are the measure of our respect for the Eucharist during the whole year.

Pope Francis reminds us that in the Body of Christ we form together by receiving the Eucharist, “there is no room for the indifference which so often seems to possess our hearts. For whoever is of Christ, belongs to one body, and in him we cannot be indifferent to one another. ‘If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy.’ (1 Cor 12:26)” (Message for Lent 2015, 04.10.2014)

In the *Didache*, one of the oldest Christian texts to survive till our day, written in the years 90-100, we read: “Assembling on every Sunday of the Lord, break bread and give thanks (...). Let no one engaged in a dispute with his comrade join you until they have been reconciled, lest your sacrifice be profaned.” (14:1-2). Just as it was for the first Christians, it should be clear to us that divisions in the Body of Christ profane the Sacrament of unity; indifference to one another in the community profanes the Sacrament of love.

When the priest says: “The Body of Christ”, we answer: “Amen”. We say “Amen” to the most sacred Body of Jesus, but we also say “Amen” to his body the Church. We say “Amen” to those close to us in life and those whom we do not know but with whom we receive communion. We cannot separate the two bodies, the Sacrament and the Church, we cannot accept or love one without the other.

To illustrate this point, as our Dominican brothers and sisters celebrate the eight hundredth anniversary of their Order, we can turn to St Dominic. We are told that “after lengthy prayers, lying face down on the pavement of the church, Dominic would rise up, and perform two simple acts of homage. First, within the church, he would ‘visit each altar in turn... until midnight’. But then ‘he would go very quietly and visit the sleeping brethren; and if necessary, he would cover them up.’” Fr Paul Murray comments: “It is almost as if Dominic is acknowledging, first of all, the presence of the sacred in the altars, and then – with no less reverence – acknowledging that same presence in his own brethren” (*Preachers...*, p. 24-25).

Today as we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, may our communion make us more aware of our belonging to the Church, to all those who, throughout the world, have been baptised in Christ and are members of his Body. As we venerate the Sacrament of the altar, may we also be given both the grace to discern Christ in all those whom we meet and the courage to act and to speak in ways that respect them.

For us the best way to adore the Eucharist is to make it a reality in our concrete lives. It was love that moved Christ to offer his life for all. It was his deep longing to “gather into one the dispersed children of God” (Jn 11:52) that led him to die on the cross. In our turn, if we want to honour the Sacrament we are celebrating, let us become seeds of love in our world, let us give our lives in love for the unity of all.