

The Body and Blood of Christ (A)
(Deuteronomy 8:2-3.14-16 / John 6:51-58)
14.06.2020
Self-giving Love & Communion

Today, in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we celebrate self-giving love and communion; we celebrate God as self-giving love and God as communion.

Maybe the first thing to mention is that word “celebrate” which I have already used twice. It is an important word. All of us, wherever we are, right now are celebrating our God in thanksgiving and with deep gratitude. This is an opportunity for me to repeat something which has been said many times from this pulpit: words matter, the words we use matter. The point to grasp is that our celebration of the Mass, is not first about our “attendance”, we do not “attend Mass”, we worship God consciously by actively participating in the liturgical celebration (cf. *SC* n. 14).

In the Body and Blood of Christ, God gives himself to us. This is the highest expression of love and this is what we celebrate. In fact real love always implies self-giving. If there is no gift of self, there is no love.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist, and all the Sacraments of the Church, are signs of God’s love because, in them, God gives himself really and totally to us.

Since we are supposed to become what we receive (cf. St Augustine), in our turn, we are called to love to the point of giving ourselves as fully as we can. In the liturgy what we celebrate does not stop at the end of the Service. Once love is given and love is received in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, in our daily lives, in all our meetings, we should continue to celebrate and to honour the Sacrament by giving and receiving love over and over again.

Obviously none of us receives or gives love as perfectly as God does it in the Sacrament. Yet in his great humility, God is happy to use the poor and limited love we have in order to transform the world. We have to remember that it is in our smallness, in our poverty that God can display his greatness and his riches.

If God is humble enough to make his love powerfully present in a small piece of bread and in a few drops of wine, then there is no doubt that his love, received in the Sacrament, can be fruitful in our small and wounded hearts and lives.

As we celebrate God’s self-giving love in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, we also celebrate communion. Love begets communion and communion makes love real. By our reception of the Sacrament, “God dwells in us and us in him” (1Jn 4:13), our communion with God is strengthened, renewed and healed.

But that is not all. Since this Sacrament deepens our communion with God, the Eucharist should deepen our communion with one another. A Eucharistic celebration which would be concerned only with the relationship of each believer with God and which would stop short of strengthening, renewing and healing the relationships between all believers would not be a Catholic celebration.

In the Church, the Sacrament is given to one person since she or he is a member of the Body of Christ. This means that the Sacrament which is for the benefice of the person is just as much for the benefice of the whole Body. In fact we could even say that the Sacrament is fruitful for the communicant insofar as it is fruitful for the whole Body. The two aspects cannot be separated.

We are not, we cannot be saved on our own. In the early church, salvation and communion were identical and the Eucharist was seen as the food of unity obtained by what Jesus endured on the cross and which unites us to God and to one another in the church. Last April, Pope Francis reminded us that “familiarity with the Lord is always in community. Yes, it is intimate, it is personal, but within the community.” (*Homily*, 17.04.2020)

Our communion with God, our communion to God in the Sacrament unites us with each other in a radically new way.

We are not joined to one another simply like pedestrians on a street or because, from the comfort of our homes, we all look at the same image on a computer screen but, because we participate in the celebration of the Sacrament of communion and love. In this way we become like children born of the same family.

Love and communion. This is what this celebration is about because God is love and he is communion and because this is what we are supposed to be. If this is true, then we cannot but ask ourselves why is it that in our so-called Christian countries, in Northern Ireland and in the United States of America for example, there is still so much sectarianism and racism, so many fears and divisions. What have we done with the Sacrament of the Eucharist?

It is vital for us to rediscover the true meaning of the Sacrament and allow its power to work truly in our lives, to convert what is amiss, to heal what is wounded, to restore what is broken, to bring light where there is darkness and to give life where sin has sown seeds of death.

Because of the restrictions due to Covid-19, today only a few among us will receive the Sacrament. Many will not be able to do so. Yet the Lord knows each one of us personally, he knows what we need, what our Churches need in order to reflect something of his love and communion in the world. We must believe that, in his kindness and generosity, the Lord wants to give us the grace we need so that we may become women and men of love and communion, united “in the sacrament of the altar and also in the bond of peace.” (St Augustine, *Letter* 185, 24, p. 194)

Using the words of St Augustine, this morning, let us offer God, “on the altar of our heart, the sacrifice of humility and praise, kindled by the fire of love (...). For God is the source of our happiness and he is the end of all desire.” (*City of God*, X, 3, p. 308)