

Corpus Christi
6/11/2023

THE NEW MANNA

On April 30, 1975, Saigon, South Vietnam fell to the communist north. On August 15, the feast of the Assumption of the same year, the co-adjutor Archbishop, Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan was arrested. He was imprisoned for 13 years at times in conditions that led him to the edge of sanity. Eventually, he was expelled from his homeland, forever.

The day after his arrest he was allowed to write for some essential items. His note included “a little wine as medicine for my stomach.” His friends understood what he was asking for. They sent him wine and also a flashlight with hosts inside it. He said, *Every day with three drops of wine and one drop of water in the palm of my hand, I would celebrate Mass. This was my altar. This was my cathedral! Each time I celebrated Mass, I had the opportunity to extend my hands and nail myself to the cross with Jesus, and to drink with him the bitter chalice. These were the most beautiful Masses of my life!*

In the first reading today, Moses at the end of his life reminded the people of Israel of what they had been through. For forty years they wandered in the wilderness and when they complained to God, he fed them with what seemed like flakes of hoarfrost present on the ground in the morning. With that they made bread. It was manna, food from heaven that sustained them on their journey to the promised land. Twice Moses reminds them that this was a food unknown to their fathers.

As we celebrate today the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known as Corpus Christi, we remember a new manna, a different bread from heaven. This bread isn't just something material but a person, Jesus Christ who truly gives himself to us, body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. Jesus is our companion on the journey through this life, our food for the journey and the goal of our journey. Simply put, *Jesus gives himself to us.* He did that by his cross and resurrection, by his paschal mystery and every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we enter into that moment and he continues to nourish himself with his real, true and abiding presence.

We speak of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Jesus is present to us in many ways. He's present when two or three gather in his name. He's present in his word and in those who minister in his name. He's present in those in need and he's present under the form of bread and wine. We speak of this as the real presence not that these forms aren't real but because it is a continuous, abiding presence. Jesus gives us his flesh and blood, his whole self, his real presence under the form of bread and wine. He is the living bread, the new manna, a food unknown to those who came before him.

Some people struggle with the idea of the Real Presence, others not, but it's found in many places throughout the New Testament, including what we just heard. For about the first fourteen centuries of Christianity, this was seldom disputed and held by nearly all Christians. After the Bible, there are writings from the early Church.

Writing about the year 105, St. Ignatius spoke of *those who hold strange doctrines....They abstain from Eucharist and prayer, because they allow not that the Eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ.*

Around the year 165 St. Justin said, *We do not receive these as common bread or common drink. But just as our Savior Jesus Christ was made flesh through the Word of God and had flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the good which has been eucharized by the prayer from Him is the flesh and blood of the Incarnate Jesus.*

About 350, St. Cyril of Jerusalem taught, *Do not therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that; for they are, according to the Master's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by the faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ.*

Our faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist isn't something invented in the middle ages but part and parcel of Christianity from the beginning.

We speak of the Eucharist as the source and summit of our faith. We have a school to lead others to the Eucharist and to share the gift we receive here. We have a food pantry because we have been fed, because we want to feed others and

ultimately lead them to the Eucharist. Everything we do as Catholic Christians is to flow from and lead towards the Eucharist.

What does this do for us? What are the fruits of Communion? The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists six such gifts or fruits and of course there are more.

- 1–The Eucharist unites us to Christ in a most intimate sharing.
- 2–The Eucharist strengthens us. What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life.
- 3–The Eucharist separates from sin, cleanses and strengthens us.
- 4–The Eucharist unites us more deeply in the mystery of the Church, with believers around the world, through the ages, in purgatory and in heaven itself.
- 5–The Eucharist commits us to the poor or at least it should. The same Christ who says, *This is my body*, is the same Christ who says, *I was hungry and you gave me to eat.*
- 6–The Eucharist is the pledge of future glory, the promise of what is to come, the appetizer to the banquet of eternal life.

Because of this, it's important to receive Communion reverently and most importantly, to receive worthily aware of the great gift we are receiving where the gift and the giver are the same. When we come to Communion it isn't just a line but a procession to Jesus. The proper gesture before receiving Communion is to bow one's head. When you hear the words, *the Body of Christ*, it's important to say, *Amen*. This isn't just a response but a profession of faith that what you are receiving is truly Jesus' body.

If you receive on the hand, please place one hand under the other raising them up. Please keep your hands flat and try not to grab the fingers of the one giving you Communion. If you receive on the tongue, after you say, Amen, please open your mouth and extend your tongue. I tell the children that in this case it isn't rude. It helps us out a lot when you do this. While we are doing these exterior things, it's important to open our hearts to what is happening on the inside, in our hearts.

Presently, we are in the second year of a Eucharistic Revival in this country. This year is called the parish phase and there will be more to come about this.

As for Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan and for so many other Christians through the centuries, the Eucharist is our food for the journey through this life. It is the new manna that leads us to a new promised land of heaven. May we always worthily share in this gift, as we journey to God, as we journey to God together, nourished by Jesus the Living Bread come down from heaven, by Jesus the new manna.