

## Corpus Christi - the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ 2011

First Reading: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a [God gave you manna & water in the desert].

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 147 [Praise the Lord, Jerusalem]

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 [Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body]

Gospel: John 6:51-58 [Whoever eats this bread will have eternal life]

♪ *Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky holy and true.*

*Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good.* ♪

The song I just sang is the refrain of a sung version of the great Canticle of Brother Sun composed by Francis of Assisi. The word "sacred" is repeated 5 times. It is appropriate to sing it today, on the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ because the Eucharist is a most *sacred* sacrament, and it reflects the goodness of God through the real presence of Christ among us.

Whenever I hold up the body and blood of Christ at Mass, I say words based on the words of St. Augustine at the Easter Vigil in his cathedral church in Africa, "Behold the Body and Life-Blood of Christ! See who you are, and be what you receive." Pope Benedict recently referred to these words in his exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*. We are called to honor Christ in the Eucharist, but even more, we are called to see each other as sacred because we are the body of Christ.

This feast is a challenge to see Christ in each other, and to be Christ for and with each other. It is a call not only to see all *life* as sacred, from conception to natural death, but to accept Christ as the guiding spirit of our lives. The body of Christ is not only the host we receive, it is the community which he brought into being. The blood of Christ is not only the consecrated wine we drink, it is the life of Jesus in us that makes it possible to live his love & truth.

When we see each other as the Body of Christ, we are living St. Paul's vision in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, "*we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*" It is true that we are a Body in need of healing, but we have been given the love and truth of God's Spirit.

If we recognize Christ in *ourselves*, and choose to be Christ for others, the Church will be renewed and become a more credible voice for life and peace for the world.

If we recognize Christ in *others*, even in those who are different from us and may disagree with us, it becomes possible to build a society and a living Church which reflects the vision of Christ and the justice, love and peace of his kingdom.

But to honor the Body and life-blood of Christ is also to honor the whole of creation - which St. Francis called sacred. The land, the water, the air - all reflect God who is good.

Pope Benedict in his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* [Charity in Truth] writes:

*"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole ... The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone, she must above all protect humankind from self-destruction."*

These words of Pope Benedict make it clear that to respect all life - and the land, water, & air that sustain it - is to respect the body of Christ, and to respect and care for ourselves. In doing that we become missionaries to the poor & to future generations. And these are the ones who are most hurt by the damage done to the water we drink, the air we breathe and the land we cultivate.

Pope Benedict also writes, *"The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its life-style, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences."*

The harmful consequences of greed and lust for power are *most* easily overlooked when they affect the poor and powerless, and future generations.

There is a song that echoes the prayer St. Francis wrote and which expresses the best of our ideals as Americans. Our brotherhood - and sisterhood - extends beyond our own shores, as the generosity of Americans to anyone in need consistently proves. But it also extends to all of creation - and to the earth itself and even to future generations. Most Americans know the first verse by heart, but the second verse reflects the Gospel call to examine our choices and institutions to see how they contribute to or detract from the well being of the poor, future generations and the earth itself.

♪ O beautiful for pilgrim feet whose stern impassioned stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat across the wilderness!  
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law! ♪