

HOMILY 21B 2015

“Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe...” That’s the end of chapter 6 of St John’s Gospel. We’ve been reading that chapter at Sunday Mass for some weeks. And over those Sundays we’ve delved a little deeper into what the Eucharist (the Mass) is.

We’ve seen the links between the Eucharist and Our Lord’s death and resurrection. Without Good Friday and Easter Sunday, that is without Our Lord’s death and resurrection, we wouldn’t have the Eucharist (the Mass). Holy Mass makes present for us all that Our Lord achieved for us when he died on the cross and rose from the dead.

The Mass truly is a *sacrifice*. It’s Our Lord’s sacrifice of himself, now made present for us. It isn’t a new offering, because Christ died once and for all. He can’t die again. But it is his offering of himself to his Father *now made present for us*. It’s his offering making our peace with God here and now. And we’ve seen how the Mass is *our* offering, *our* sacrifice, as well.

We could go on and on about the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. But it’s time to move on. To move on to the Mass as *Sacrament*. When we come together for holy Mass we gather around the altar. The altar here beside me is two things at once. It’s the altar of sacrifice. It’s also the

table of the Lord. What do we do at a table? We eat and drink. So too here, at the altar, the table of the Lord. Here we take part in what the Church calls a Sacred Banquet. It's the sacred banquet of communion with Our Lord himself.

Here at the altar we receive Christ Our Lord in Holy Communion – Our Lord who offered himself for us. We complete his *sacrifice* by receiving the *Sacrament* of Holy Communion. We receive Our Lord himself, present in this most holy Sacrament.

We've seen just now in the Gospel how some people who heard him couldn't take it. "How can he give us his flesh to eat?" they asked. "This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?" Perhaps some people even today would say that. They might say, "Oh, this is just a symbol of the body and blood of Christ." But Jesus didn't say, "This is just a symbol." Nor did he say, "Hey, wait a minute. You've got me wrong. I don't mean it literally." No, he let them go. He *did* mean what he said. And from the time of the Last Supper onwards, the Church has kept the true faith in the Eucharist.

We could spend all day looking at examples of the Catholic belief in the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. We believe that in the Blessed Sacrament it is Jesus himself who is here. We say he is *truly* present, *really* present, *substantially* present. *Truly* present – here himself, not like a picture or a photo or an image, but truly

himself. Really present – present not just because we believe, but here whether we believe or not. *Substantially* present – here in his own deep reality which our senses can't detect.

St Thomas Aquinas puts it neatly in one of his hymns. He says, "Sight, touch and taste in thee are each deceived. The ear alone most safely is believed." In other words, what we see and touch and taste in this Sacrament appear to be bread and wine. Our senses of sight and touch and taste *are* deceived. But we've heard the words of consecration. From what we *hear* we know that this bread and wine is now Our Lord himself. Thanks to the words of consecration and the work of God's Holy Spirit, the bread and wine have changed.

So at Holy Communion it is Christ Our Lord himself who comes to us. St Paul writes that "the cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the Blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the Body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16) Christ's Body and Blood are not of course separate now. They were once – when Our Lord died on the cross. You remember how the soldier pierced Our Lord's side with a lance, and "there flowed out blood and water". (John 19:34) With all his suffering, all the blood had drained from his body.

But *now* – *now* Our Lord is risen and alive. Where his body is, there too is his blood and his soul and his divinity; in other words, his whole self. So that when we receive Holy Communion the whole person of

Jesus Christ Our Lord comes to us. And that is true whether we receive Holy Communion under the appearance of bread only or under the appearance of wine only. And by the way, please don't say (if you have gone to Mass and received Communion under both kinds) "We received the wine". It is no longer wine, just as it is no longer bread. The *appearances* of bread and wine remain. But our Communion is a person to person meeting with *Him*. And with Our Lord as he is now – risen and alive. This is truly communion with Our Lord himself.

And let's note here something which is very important. When we eat ordinary food we convert that food into ourselves. We assimilate what we eat. What we eat becomes part of us. It keeps our human life going. Not so with Holy Communion. In fact the opposite happens. *We* are assimilated into *Christ*. We are changed into him. "Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up ... Whoever eats me will live because of me." Again St Paul, "I live, not I, it is Christ who lives in me." (Gal 2:20)

By receiving Holy Communion therefore we should become more like Christ himself. He brings about in us "the mind that was in Christ Jesus". (cf Phil 2:5) How we feel – the things we want – how we think and live – all should become more Christ-like. And if for some reason we can't receive the Sacrament we should always make a Spiritual Communion. That means that we receive Communion at least by our desire. We tell Our Lord, in our own words, that we know he is here

and we believe it, and that for some reason we can't receive him in the Sacrament. But we want him to come to us. Very simply and sincerely we say, like St Peter, "Lord, you know I love you". And we ask him to come spiritually into our souls. A spiritual communion like that can be a genuine source of grace.

"Will you go away too?" No. Every day we will choose again to follow Christ. Every morning, make time for a few moments of prayer. Decide consciously again that day that you will follow Christ. You will try to live as a Christian. You will choose *his* way over any other. Find a morning offering – a prayer that puts it in a way that helps you, and make a habit of saying that prayer before the day gets going. "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe ..."