

Body and Blood 2017
06/18/17

I have told you before how wonderful it is to be able to prepare homilies. But before I get into my thoughts about today's feast, let me share a story from Reader's Digest, as retold by my friend, Fr. Joe Robinson.

It seems a tough old cowboy had told his grandson that the secret to long life was sprinkling a little gun powder on his oatmeal every morning. The grandson did this religiously and, sure enough, lived to the ripe old age of 93. When he died, he left behind 10 children, 28 grandchildren, 35 great grandchildren, and a 15-foot hole in the wall of the crematorium. As funny and pretty unbelievable as that story is, there's a better secret to a long life than putting gunpowder on our breakfast cereal: it is Jesus' teaching about eternal life in today's Gospel. First, let me speak about the reading from Deuteronomy.

As many times as I've read about and talked about manna, this past week I learned or perhaps was reminded that it means, "what is this?" Not only is that a good way to look at the food that fed the Israelites in the desert, it also applies to the feast we celebrate today, the Body and Blood of Christ.

David Knight says that the Eucharist is a clear sign of an incomprehensible mystery. The mystery it speaks is beyond our understanding, much like the mystery we celebrated last week, the mystery of the Holy Trinity. But the blessing promised by the Eucharist is obvious to the smallest child. The greatest genius could not explain the Eucharist, but only a fool would fail to make use of it.

Knight concludes by telling us that, even while our wondering hearts repeat, "What is this?", we are able to 'taste and see that the Lord is good', words taken from Psalm 34. We need not understand the Eucharist fully to receive it, but we must receive Eucharist to appreciate it. The Eucharist is given to be experienced. Those who receive it frequently will recognize it for what it is: Jesus' flesh for the life of the world.

Fr. Robinson explains it this way. He says that we cannot see with our eyes that bread and wine have been changed into the Body and Blood of Christ; we can only see that this is so with our mind. We allow our mind to see what our eyes cannot because we have chosen to believe what Jesus said. As Robinson seeks to believe and visualize the Eucharist as Jesus Himself, he is helped by modern physics of all things.

Physics tells us that a substance may look solid but it really isn't, because everything around us is made up of atoms and molecules. Stay with me as I continue with his reflection. He suggests there's a lot of space in things, and a lot of energy. He then visualizes the Eucharist in terms of Divine energy. He pictures the Holy Spirit transforming the normal energy that's in wheat and wine into divine energy, an energy that somehow creates in us eternal life. But, of course, what that means exactly we have yet to find out. What we do know is that reception of communion places us in communion with each other. Let me compare that to modern technology.

When we're in communion with Jesus, it's like having a clear signal on our cell phone. At times, however, we can encounter false towers and unreliable service. We lose touch, we get disconnected. Even worse, we may not even know what we're missing. How often have you found yourself saying to your mobile device, "Hello? Are you there?" Or the line from the commercial a while back: "Can you hear me now?"

In a similar way, we stand in the way of the possibilities we can have when we partake in the Body and Blood of Jesus. We choose not to let Jesus into our being. We choose not to follow the commandments we are given. It is ultimately our responsibility to make sure the signal is clear between us and Jesus.

When someone hollers, "Dinner's ready", we gather around a common table and share a meal. But that's not all we share. We usually share stories about our lives. Sharing stories around the Eucharistic table allows us to stay in communion with each other and Jesus. That's a gift He gave us and one that simply cannot be left unshared.