

Corpus Christi – C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

Introduction

The feast of Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ, recalls the institution of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday at the Last Supper. The prime thought during Holy Week is sorrow over the Passion of Jesus so this feast focuses our attention on the joy that comes from that event. This feast honors the Real Presence of Christ and was promoted by the visions of Juliana of Liege (in France), an Augustinian nun who understood from her visions that God wanted a feast to honor the Blessed Sacrament, in response to a controversy that had arisen which had made the presence of Christ in the Eucharist more symbolic than real. First celebrated as a local feast, Pope Urban IV extended it to the Universal Church in 1264. The Mass and office for the feast of Corpus Christi was composed by Saint Thomas Aquinas while he was a member of the Papal court of Urban IV.

1st Reading - Genesis 14:18-20

Today we hear of the appearance of Melchizedek to Abram. The existence of Melchizedek is known only from these three verses in scripture (and referred to in the Letter to the Hebrews), nestled into an account of Abram's meeting with the King of Sodom after Abram has successfully led a battle in which he has defeated the four kings who had defeated five kings and kidnaped Lot. The king of Sodom was one of the five kings who had been freed by Abram.

¹⁸ Melchizedek,

The name Melchizedek means "justice."

king of Salem,

The name Salem means "peace." He is King of Justice and King of Peace. In Jewish tradition as reflected in the targums, Melchizedek is Shem, firstborn son of Noah; the only righteous firstborn in Genesis except for Abram. Reconstruction of the genealogies in Genesis shows that Shem outlived Abraham (Abram) by 35 years. Likewise, Salem is later named "Yahweh-yireh" in Genesis 22:14 when Abram takes Isaac there to offer him as sacrifice. Today we know it as "Yireh-Salem" (Jerusalem).

brought out bread and wine,

It is not clear that these are brought out as an offering to God rather than for sustenance but the association with the title "Priest of God Most High" certainly points to that direction. Up until the sin of the golden calf, God did not require animal sacrifices, thus the bread and wine would have been a most suitable offering and serve as a precursor of the Eucharist, a covenant meal.

and being a priest of God Most High,

Melchizedek is not only a king, but a priest as well, a Priest-King. He is the first priest mentioned in the Bible.

he blessed Abram with these words:¹⁹ **“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,**

The last time a blessing is mentioned in Holy Scripture is when Noah gives his blessing to Shem. Could this be the priestly blessing which the father gives to the righteous son? I believe that it is. It is the same blessing which Abraham passes on to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob . . .

the creator of heaven and earth;²⁰ **And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand.”**

Abram’s victory was the result of God’s intervention.

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

A tithe. Abram, the most powerful warrior, who has defeated the four kings who had defeated the five kings, doesn’t accept a tithe, but gives one showing that he recognizes Melchizedek not as an inferior or equal, but as a superior (or as a representative of one). If in fact Melchizedek is Shem, firstborn son of Noah, he is the priest of the family of Noah then this would be homage by Abram to his elder brother and it all makes sense.

Gospel - Luke 9:11-17

Our gospel reading today recalls the feeding of the five thousand; a precursor to the Eucharist. If Jesus can feed five thousand until they are all full from five loaves and two fishes, and he can turn bread and wine into His Body and Blood, He certainly can turn as much bread and wine into Himself as would be needed to give the entire world the meal which seals our covenant with God. This is the only miracle story which is common to all four gospels.

The setting is this: Jesus and His disciples are in Galilee and the disciples have just returned from preaching and curing Gods’ people. They are now to receive a new charge – to feed the people of Israel.

¹¹ The crowds, meanwhile, learned of this and followed him. He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured. ¹² As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, “Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.”

In all the gospels, but especially in Luke, the miracles of Jesus occur around food: while going to eat, at table, and just after eating.

¹³ He said to them, “Give them some food yourselves.” They replied, “Five loaves and two fish

Both numbers in Hebrew numerology are incomplete numbers, two representing a few and five, half the basic number; but together they total seven, the number of the covenant and perfection.

are all we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people.”

In Mark 6:37 the reply is much sharper: “Are we to buy 200 days’ wages worth of food?”

¹⁴ Now the men there numbered about five thousand. Then he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of (about) fifty.”

The number which in Hebrew is *nun* and also means “fish.” Hebrew does not have special words for numbers but uses existing words to express them (sort of like roman numerals which are really letters).

¹⁵ They did so and made them all sit down. ¹⁶ Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

Luke very purposefully uses the same language as that which describes the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19) and in the Emmaus story (Luke 24:30) “took . . . looked up . . . blessed . . . broke . . . gave.”

¹⁷ They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up,

The Greek word used here *klasmata* for “fragments” is the same as is used in the Didache as the technical term for the broken particles of the Eucharist.

they filled twelve wicker baskets.

Symbolic that there is enough to feed all the tribes of Israel. At the feeding of the four thousand, there are seven baskets left; symbolic that there is enough to feed all the Gentile tribes that had occupied Canaan prior to the Israelites arrival at the end of their exodus.

Luke, of all the evangelists, immediately links this feeding account with Jesus’ prediction of His passion and His instructions about bearing one’s cross daily (Luke 9:18-27). To celebrate the Eucharist is to join in His life and share not only His mission of preaching, teaching, and curing, but also His dedication and destiny symbolized by the cross (Luke 9:18-27).

Praying with Scripture

Modified *Lectio Divina* (Divine Reading)

Read

1. Read the passage out loud (if possible), slowly, simply to become familiar with it.

Reflect

2. Read the passage again, silently.

Ask the Lord to let you read and “hear” it as if this was the first time; what does it mean? How would you tell/explain this story in your own words?

(Not more than 5 or 6 sentences.)

Spontaneous **3. Pick one person from the passage: _____.**

Prayer

Imagine that you are in this person’s “shoes.”

(Note: If the passage does not specifically name persons in its text, simply see if the words themselves evoke any particular feeling. Does it call to mind a previous, or presently occurring, incident or relationship in your life?)

A. How does it feel to be in this situation?

B. Does it remind you of something or someone in your life?

C. Is there anything you would say or do differently?

D. Have a “heart to Heart” talk with Jesus sharing your honest feelings about anything that has come to mind in reference to your reflecting on this passage. It might be something that is weighing heavily on your heart, or something that moves you to a deep sense of gratitude and joyful praise.

Choose one word or phrase from this passage that has a special meaning for you _____.

Resting in God **4. Read the passage again. Close your eyes. Think of your favorite picture of Jesus and LISTEN to HIM.**

(Spend this time in simple silence, waiting and quietly listening for whatever the Lord might “whisper” in your heart.)

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