

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ  
June 5-6, 2010  
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“Where are you, God?”

That's the question which was welling up in my heart as I walked down the hospital hallway. I was going to visit a young mother whose five-month-old baby boy had been stricken with a rare and fatal form of cancer. This little child had been through so much already – treatments, procedures – yet it was clear that he was not going to live.

So, as I walked down the hallway to that hospital room, I found myself asking, “Why is this happening? If God is all-loving, why do things like this happen to a little boy, and his mom?”

“Where are you, God?”

As I approached the hospital room, I heard gentle singing inside. After knocking on the door, I walked in. And this is what I saw: the young mother, exhausted from too many nights in that hospital room. She was breastfeeding her infant son, and she was singing to him in a soft voice. This is what she sang: “this is my body, which I give to you.”

A little while later, she told me that the doctors had decided to stop all treatment for her son. Her son's death was near. She told me, “There's nothing else that anyone can do. So I will just be here for him, and I'll keep loving him.”

*I will just be here for him, and I'll keep loving him.*

Years later, I asked her if I could share this story with people like you, because it seems to me that this young woman was teaching me more about the Eucharist, and more about God, than any seminary textbook.

When every other person and power on the planet had given up on her child – when every other person and power on the planet had determined that there was nothing more to be done – she knew that there was something more to do. When everyone else was saying that it was time to give up, what did she do? She stayed with her child, so that he would know that he was not alone. She stayed with him, and she loved him. When she and her boy were worn out and exhausted, what did she do? She nourished her child with her own body. Her body, given to him. Her own flesh and blood becoming nourishment for her child. “I'll just be here for him, and I'll keep loving him.”

You may think it a bit odd, on this Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, that I chose the image of a mother breastfeeding her son, to express the mystery and gift of the Eucharist. But think about it – isn't Jesus like a mom? After all, he nourishes us with his

very life, his very self, his very Body and Blood. Why does he do this? So that we can know –even when every other person and power on the planet has let us down – we can know through the Eucharist that the Lord is with us, near us, loving us.

What an amazing gift this Eucharist is!

In today's first reading, we meet a figure who comes out of the mists of the Old Testament. Melchizedek seems to be both a king and a priest of some kind, and he comes forth to Abram, with bread and wine in hand, to bless him as he undertakes the long, challenging journey that God had asked him to undertake. The bread and the wine were symbols of all the ways that God would sustain Abram.

By the time of the New Testament, an even deeper understanding had emerged. God's people had prayed, but there were still times when God felt far off. So, God does something decisive. God sends us...himself. God sends Christ. Christ shed his OWN blood on the cross, and thus defeated Death. The night before he died, Jesus gave us his own Body and Blood in the gift of the Eucharist, so that we could always be nourished by his love, always confident of his presence.

God is not far off. God does not let us wander through life, isolated and without assistance. Even when every other person and power on this planet has failed us, here – at the table of the Eucharist – Christ shouts a different message to our hearts. Here, at the table of the Eucharist, Christ says to us, "I am as close to you as a mother feeding her child. I am here for you in this Sacrament. I am with you, and I love you."

There is one more aspect of today's Gospel which demands our attention. After Jesus broke the bread and shared the cup of that first Eucharist, the Gospel of Mark says this: "After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." Notice the dynamic there. Jesus had just given those first disciples the gift of his presence in the broken bread and the shared cup. But he did not let them stay in that Upper Room, basking in a pious moment of tranquility. He fed them, and then he said, "Let's go." He fed them, and then led them. He led them out, he led them into the dark of that night, out to the Mount of Olives, where violent men had violent intentions against Jesus and his message. Jesus fed them...he fed them for mission.

As it was with them, so it is with us. The Eucharist is given to us, but not just as an experience of Christ's real presence. Christ feeds us, and then he immediately leads us: out the door, through the driveway, on to Gayton Road, out into the mountains, valleys, neighborhoods and homes where His message needs to take flesh. There are still violent men and women in our world who oppose Christ and his messengers. We are his messengers, and we betray the Eucharist – we betray the Eucharist – if we think that Christ gave us this gift only so that we could have a warm and wonderful experience of his love safe inside the walls of this church.

He feeds us with himself, and then says, "Let's go." We are fed with his body, so that we can become his witnesses in the world. He sends us into every nook and cranny of this

earth which still needs healing, justice, and good news. At the end of Mass, it will be time for us to go – out to where women still hold their dying children; go out to where bombs, guns, and poverty still cause parents and children to weep; go out to hospitals rooms, living rooms, and prison cells, taking Good News with you.

Go to your daily life and daily work, and understand that you are fed here at the altar for a reason. You are fed here, with the Body and Blood of Christ. Then sing a hymn, and go out, to your own Mount of Olives, and overcome the darkness with the power of the Risen One.