

## SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST “A”

JUNE 25/26, 2011

Two months ago at our parish’s Eucharistic Day of Renewal Deacon Ron Smith presented an analogy about the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist which I have spent a great deal of time mulling over.

Deacon Ron likened the Holy Eucharist to the human heart. The heart, as we know, is the central life-giving and sustaining organ of our bodies. It serves as the receptacle which receives the energy spent blood through the venal system, pumps it through the lungs where it picks up oxygen and then pumps it out through the arteries to deliver nutrients that grow and sustain bodily life. This life-giving and life-sustaining cycle is unending until the moment of physical death. At the moment the heart stops, everything else in the body shuts down. Deacon Ron’s analogy is a most fitting means for understanding and living the mystery of today’s feast in honor of the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist.

The heart of our life of faith is the person of Jesus Christ. In establishing the church, which St. Paul names the body of Christ, Jesus left us a means of on-going sustenance and life-giving nourishment—the gift of himself under the sacramental symbols of bread and wine, his body and blood. At the core of the life of the church is the celebration of the Mass, the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist is the heart of the church. The Holy Eucharist is Jesus with us. The whole of the life of Jesus—his birth, his life, death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation to heaven, the bestowal of his and the Father’s gift of their love, the Holy Spirit—is made present in every Mass. “I am the living bread come down from heaven” Jesus tells us today, “whoever eats this bread will live forever.” Just like our daily need for nourishment to sustain physical life, Jesus commanded his disciples in his name to celebrate his once-for-all sacrificial self-offering and continued risen presence through the Holy Eucharist, “Do this in memory of me”. Since Jesus’ Resurrection, the church has gathered every Sunday to be fed by Jesus through his word in the Scripture and his Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Participation in Sunday Mass is not an option if we are committed to

living fully life in Christ. Just as lack of physical nourishment over time weakens us and, if not checked, will lead to our death, so irregular participation or prolonged absence from Sunday Mass will weaken or eventually cause our life in Christ to die.

Like the blood flowing to the heart through the veins, its life in need of renewal, we come again and again to the Holy Eucharist. In this we are like the Hebrew people on their desert journey in today's reading from Deuteronomy. We come with the burdens, cares, concerns, sufferings of our daily lives. We come, like them, tired from our journey. In our hunger and thirst we look to God. Just as God fed the Hebrew people with "bread from heaven" in the form of manna, so God feeds us in the Mass. But what we are given is not earthly food, wonderful as the original miracle of the manna was. Rather, God gives us himself, his divine life, in and through Jesus, the true heavenly bread.

Just as our human blood receives nourishment and new strength as it passes into and out from our heart, so we, too, receive new strength in Jesus for our life as we pass into and through the Holy Eucharist. The Communion procession at every Mass, and the solemn outdoor procession that marks this feast, are reminders that just like our oxygenated blood, we are sent to course through the world bearing the life of Christ to every person we encounter until the next time we return to this sacrament to again be renewed and missioned. St. Paul reminds us we are what we receive, "the body of Christ." Entering into the heart of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist *changes* us. The sacramental eating and drinking of Jesus' Body and Blood is the culmination of the self-giving that is now to be part of our daily life. We can't just put on a costume or cloak of being Jesus' followers; sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ means that we share in Jesus' life of self-giving. This means becoming more aware of other's needs and responding to them; it means doing our everyday tasks well and out of love; it means being honest, just and forgiving. It means living so that others may live.

A popular brand of car calls itself "The Heartbeat of America." The Holy Eucharist is "The Heartbeat of the Church". We who receive it are sent into the world as "The Heartbeat of Christ."