

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST “C”
JUNE 1/2, 2013

Shortly before arriving here as pastor, the Pastoral Council emailed me about twenty questions in order, as it was stated, “to help us get to know you.” One question solicited my thoughts on Eucharistic adoration. Another, my thoughts regarding the outreach efforts of the Social Justice Committee. In responding I took the opportunity to link the two questions. The celebration of the Mass and the devotional practice of Eucharistic Adoration divorced from a commitment to engagement in the traditional corporal and spiritual works of mercy, justice in many forms, becomes mere pietism, spiritual “navel-gazing.” Engagement in social action divorced from the celebration of the Eucharist and an active prayer life in which Eucharistic Adoration is a commendable practice, becomes just another form of social work, good as it may be, carried out by secular agencies or governments, today as we know, sometimes in ways contrary to gospel values. Today’s celebration of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ links both Eucharistic liturgical practice and Eucharistic living.

In St. Paul’s account of the institution of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper in today’s second reading, we have the earliest New Testament account of the words and gestures of Jesus as they were already being implemented in the church’s celebration of the Mass. In both his words and gestures (taking, giving thanks, breaking/sharing) Jesus identifies himself and his life’s work with the bread and wine and as he hands them to his disciples states that he and they “are given for you.” The Eucharist is a sacrament not only of the on-going presence of the Risen Jesus under sacramental symbol, traditionally expressed by the terms, body, blood, soul and divinity, but also a sacrament with a missionary/service mandate, “Do this in memory of me.”

In today’s first reading we have the encounter of Melchizedek the priest with Abraham. Melchizedek brings out bread and wine, symbols of God’s gifts of life and

grace, and giving them to Abraham blesses him with them. In response, Abraham, “tithes ten percent” of his earthly goods to Melchizedek as his offering to God in response to all God has given him.

In today’s Gospel of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish we have a development of the scene in today’s first reading. In it, as we heard, Jesus does not separately provide food for the crowd. Rather he invites the disciples to share of their own food, the symbol and means of their own life’s sustenance. In the act of the disciples taking, breaking, and sharing their resources offered in faith to Jesus a multitude of people are fed. While this miracle happened in a specific time and place, Saint Luke recorded it for us as an invitation to also risk allowing Jesus to take, break, and share us and the spiritual and material gifts we have received as the bread and cup of life for others in imitation of his own self-sacrificing love, to ourselves become his Body and Blood for the world. When we receive Jesus’ gift of self in the Holy Eucharist, or spend time in prayer in Eucharistic Adoration, and then choose to imitate Abraham and the apostles allowing ourselves to be transformed into that same gift for others, we become the visible presence of the kingdom of God. That is the meaning of the procession with the Blessed Sacrament through the local neighborhood, a public statement not only of our belief and reverence for the gift of Jesus to us in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, but a symbol of what the Christian life consists in, following Christ, sharing Christ, by taking up his message and his work in the world. Today as we celebrate this annual feast in honor of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ Pope Francis has asked us in a special way to be united with him in prayer and devotion in this Year of Faith to unite ourselves with him both in devotion to the Holy Eucharist and in its missionary call to proclaim the gospel to the world in word and deed.

Be, the body of Christ. Become the blood of Christ.