

**SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD "A"  
JUNE 21/222, 2014**

A recovering alcoholic shared with me the dynamics of an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting this way: "It's funny, the meetings are always the same, the exact same things get said over and over again. Everything is totally predictable; everyone, except those who are there for the first time, know already what will be said. And we're not there to show our best sides to each other. I don't go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting to share my talents or to be a nice guy. No, I go because, if I don't, I know, and know for sure, that I will start drinking again and eventually destroy myself. It's that simple. I go there to stay alive!"

In a curious, but accurate way, this also can be a description of our experience of the Eucharist (certainly its ritual aspects) as well as one important aspect of it. Among other reasons, we go to the Eucharist, Sunday after Sunday (and for some on a daily basis) is to stay alive. The Eucharist is God's regular nourishment for us, daily manna to keep us alive within the desert of our lives as we journey from our baptismal washing to the vision of the heavenly banquet of eternity.

We get this theology from John's Gospel. In John's Gospel, at the Last Supper, it is the washing of feet that takes precedence. The other accounts of the institution of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, of Jesus' words: "This is my Body", "This is my Blood" over the bread and wine and their incorporation into the early church's celebration of it were already well known and established in the earliest celebrations of the Holy Eucharist by the time John wrote his gospel. John, in placing the washing of the feet front and center is reminding us that service to, and humility to, each other is another important component to eating the "Body" and drinking the "Blood" of the Lord in the Eucharist. It is the same message St. Paul conveys in today's second reading reminding us that eating and drinking of the Lord in the act of Holy Communion is not primarily about private devotion or private salvation, but about being incorporated into, and strengthening the bonds of, communion as members of the Body of Christ, the

community of the church. Like a recovering alcoholic who does not come to sobriety, and continues on the journey of sobriety alone, we do not come to salvation nor live our life of discipleship alone, but with others.

While emphasizing the service dimension of the Eucharist, the Gospel of John gives us the spirituality of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper in the sixth chapter of his gospel from which we have just read. There, Jesus says: “Unless you eat of the bread of life you will have not have life within you.” In speaking of the bread of life, Jesus links it to the manna, the daily feeding that Israel received from God during her years in the desert in the first reading. For all those years, manna was Israel’s daily food, and often times, her only food. Jesus takes this experience of Israel to a new level. He identifies himself as the new manna, the new bread from heaven, the new way that God gives us daily sustenance. Eating and drinking of him gives, and sustains, life. This eating and drinking is both spiritual (putting faith in his word) and physical (the act of eating and drinking bread and wine). As the eternal divine Son of God, the words of Jesus effect what they signify. In the Eucharist, while the outward appearances of bread and wine remain the same to our physical senses, the word of Jesus uttered at the Last Supper and again today here at Mass through the Holy Spirit by the priest, have the same effect: the reality of bread and wine become the person and presence of the Risen Jesus with us. This is what we mean by the doctrine of the “True Presence” of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Like a recovering alcoholic who knows that without sharing communion of life with fellow alcoholics through regular participation in Alcoholics Anonymous can be the beginning of reverting to their former way of life and destruction of themselves, so too, without the Sunday Eucharist, without the on-going gift of Jesus as our manna, our “daily bread” without our partaking of it together, we, too, risk reverting to our former sinful lives, dying of spiritual hunger and thirst, suffering eternal death.

Lord, give us this day our daily bread!