

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST “B”
JUNE 6/7, 2015

In reading today’s familiar Gospel account of the Last Supper, there is a detail that I noticed for the first time as I reflected and prepared this homily. Like most people, I tend to concentrate on the end of the passage, the account of Jesus instituting the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist. But, there is a detail occurring at the beginning of the story that helps us understand the nature and purpose of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist we honor in today’s celebration.

At the beginning of the story Jesus instructs his disciples following their question as to where they are going to eat the Passover Supper to “Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. . . . Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” (Mk. 14:13-15).

Have we ever thought of these words as referencing us? In each Holy Mass Jesus comes to us as guest, enters our “house”, our “guest room”, our heart. Jesus does not force his presence or the gift of himself on us. He waits for us to show him hospitality, the “large upper room, furnished and ready” for our encounter.

Every time we invite Jesus into our homes, that is to say, into our life with all its light and dark sides, and offer him the place of honor at our table, he takes bread and the cup of wine and hands them to us saying, “Take and eat, this is my body. Take and drink, this is my blood. Do this in memory of me.” The Eucharist is the most ordinary and the most divine gesture imaginable. That is the truth of Jesus. So human, yet so divine; so familiar, yet so mysterious; so close, yet so revealing! Jesus is God-for-us, God-with-us, God-within-us. Jesus is God giving himself completely, pouring himself out for us without reserve. Jesus doesn’t hold back or cling to his own possessions. He gives all there is to give. “Eat, drink, this is my body, this is my blood..., this is me for you!”

We all know of this same desire, to give ourselves at the table. When guests come into our homes, dine at our table, we say: “Eat and drink: I made this for you. Help

yourself! Don't be bashful! Take more! Have seconds! (An Italian friend of mine always urges me: "Manga, manga" [Take, eat, eat!]). It is here for you to enjoy, to be strengthened, yes, to feel how much I love you." What we desire is not simply to give food and drink, but to give ourselves. As we urge the guests at our table to eat and drink we want to say, "Be my friend, be my companion, be my love—be part of my life—I want to give myself to you."

In the Holy Eucharist, Jesus gives all. The bread is not simply a sign of his desire to become our food; the cup is not just a sign of his willingness to be our drink. Bread and wine become his body and blood in the giving. The bread, indeed, is his body given for us; the wine his blood poured out for us as the author of Hebrews reminds us today. As God becomes fully present to us in Jesus, so Jesus becomes fully present to us in the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist. God not only became flesh for us in a time and country a long time ago. God also becomes our food and drink for us at this moment of the Eucharistic celebration, right where we are, gathered with each other around the table of the altar. God does not hold back; God gives all. That is the mystery of the Incarnation, of God-become-human we celebrate at Christmas. That, too, is the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Only the mode of the presence is different: human flesh and blood which lived, died and rose in history; bread and wine products of the earth and work of human hands, taken up and changed into God. The sacrifice on the cross and the sacrifice of the table are one sacrifice, one complete divine self-giving that reaches out to all humanity in time and space. The word that best expresses this mystery of God's total self-giving love is "communion."

Again Jesus comes, wishes to recline at our table, encounter us, share holy communion. "Blessed are those called to dine in the Kingdom of God."

*(Much of this homily is taken from **Henri Nouwen, Jesus: A Gospel**, edited by Michael O'Laughlin, Orbis Books, New York, 2002, pp. 86-88.)*