

Corpus Christi

Liturgically speaking, we are now in what is called Ordinary Time. It began after our celebration of Pentecost two weeks ago. But before we go into numbering our Sundays in ordinary time simply numerically (the 17th, the 18th, the 19th Sunday of the Year), we have two feasts to celebrate, that of the Trinity (last Sunday), and today's feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, or Corpus Christi. Some say that today's feast should not be given this place of honor. The liturgical year should end with the celebration of the Feast of the Trinity, for that is our final view of God's reality. But there it is, and so we must deal with it.

When we celebrated the Feast of the Trinity, we celebrated the fact that because Jesus of Nazareth is both God and man, we humans can now claim to belong to God's very own family. Indeed, using as our premise the idea that children who belong to the same family are said to be related by blood, we can even claim that we are now related to God by blood. We are like God's blood family because of Jesus. And, as we often say, blood runs thicker than water. Which I think means that when the chips are down, we can and should depend for help from our families more than from

anyone else. That may not always be true, but apparently it proves true often enough to warrant the existence of this familiar expression: blood is thicker than blood. Applied here, it means that we can and should depend on the Jesus more than anyone else, for he is our blood brother.

But ordinarily we don't like to talk about blood. We know that blood is precious. We know that we need it to live. We like it when it stays where it belongs, unseen and inside our bodies, but we shy away from it when it becomes visible, even when contained in a plastic bag. And yet talk of it crops up when we want to think of heroism in human life. The phrase "blood, sweat and tears" comes to mind. Some of you may think of a rock band when you hear that phrase. I thought of Winston Churchill attempting to rouse his nation to fight for its life against Hitler's air force already bombing London. I thought he used this phrase, but he didn't. He spoke of blood, toil, tears and sweat. But it was close. And both his phrase and the simpler one, blood, sweat and tears, owe their existence to hymns speaking of the Lord Jesus in his passion. In Luke's Gospel we read of Jesus praying in the Garden before his arrest: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (22:44).

Today's feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord wants to make us aware of what the Lord did for us. He sweated blood for us. And when we celebrate the Eucharist, we are recalling that fact. We recall the time before his death when he gathered with his disciples at a meal and identified the bread and wine on the table as his body broken for them and his blood poured out for them. It had not happened yet. He has been telling them that it was about to happen, but they would not believe him. And now he was telling them that after it happened, after his death, they were to remember what he had done by sharing in a meal of bread and wine in which they would see the bread to be his body broken for them and the wine his blood poured out for them. And in doing that they would also be committing themselves to do the same for each other. They, like him, were to pour out their lives, their very blood, for each other.

When we eat the Lord's bread and drink the Lord's blood today, let us remind ourselves of two things: to be thankful for what he has done for us, for we needed help and he has given it to us, and, secondly, to be aware of the fact that in receiving his gift, in eating his body and drinking his blood, we are committing ourselves to a new way of life, his way of life, lives lived in intense love for our sisters and brothers. Amen.

