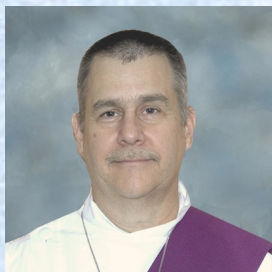


Homily Rerun: June 18, 2017 - Deacon Bruce



Our Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy presents Moses addressing the people of Israel, after their forty years of wandering, at the point of entering the Promised Land. Moses appeals to them, urging them to remember how God cared for them during their long pilgrimage. **"Do not forget the LORD, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery; who guided you through the vast and terrible desert . . .; who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock and fed you in the desert with manna."** (Dt 8: 2-3, 14-16)

Moses calls on them to recall God's saving actions. He reminds them exactly what God did for them and how He sustained them in their wandering in the desert by giving them manna. The reference to manna connects us to today's Gospel.

The original manna was a gift from God to sustain the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness. The new Bread from heaven is a gift from God in a far more remarkable way. Jesus describes the bread that he will give as **"my flesh for the life of the world"** (John 6:51). The allusion is to his death, where, in His love for us, He will lay down His human life that the world might share His divine eternal life.

In the year 304 the Emperor forbade Christians, under penalty of death, from possessing the Scriptures, from gathering to celebrate the Eucharist, and from building places in which to hold their assemblies. One Sunday, in a small village in present-day Tunisia, 49 Christians were captured while they were celebrating the Eucharist. They were arrested and taken to Carthage to be interrogated by the Proconsul.

When the Proconsul asked one of the Christians why they had disobeyed the Emperor's orders, knowing the punishment was death, he replied: "We cannot live without joining together on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist. We would lack the strength to face our daily problems and not to succumb." After atrocious tortures, these 49 martyrs were killed.

The experience of these martyrs is one on which we Christians should reflect. Fr. SENO has told us on many occasions that it is not easy to live as Christians, yet we are spared the cruel treatment of those martyrs. I wonder how many of us would still gather for Sunday Mass if it meant a possibility of torture and death?

From a spiritual point of view, the world in which we find ourselves, can appear a desert just as **"vast and terrible"** (Dt 8: 15) as the one we heard about in the Today's First Reading. God came to the aid of the Jewish people in the desert with His gift of manna, to make them understand that **"not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord"** (Dt 8: 3).

In today's Gospel, Jesus has explained to us, through the gift of manna, for what bread God wanted to prepare the people of the New Covenant. Alluding to the Eucharist He said: **"This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."** (Jn 6: 58). We need this Bread to face the fatigue and weariness of our own journey.

Pope Benedict has said, **"The Sunday precept is not, therefore, an externally imposed duty, a burden on our shoulders. On the contrary, taking part in the Celebration, being nourished by the Eucharistic Bread and experiencing the communion of their brothers and sisters in Christ is a need for Christians, it is a joy; Christians can thus replenish the energy they need to continue on the journey we must make every week."**

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:51) The Eucharist is a promise of eternal life by Jesus, by God Himself. Eucharist has a transforming effect in us and on us - an effect that we might not always be conscious of - it molds us, gets us ready for heaven.

When we receive Holy Communion, we should make ourselves conscious of Jesus' presence and work within us at that moment. If we don't pay attention to what's happening when we receive Holy Communion, Jesus cannot work within us because Jesus cannot work within a closed heart. Jesus will not force His way in to us. It is no small thing to receive Holy Communion. We should all pray for the sense of awe, for a deeper understanding of what receiving Holy Communion really means.

The Jesus we receive in Holy Communion, He is the one same Christ who is present in the Eucharistic Bread of every place on earth. This means that we can encounter Him only together with all others. We can only receive Him in unity. Is not this what St. Paul said in the Second reading we just heard? In writing to the Corinthians he said: **"Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf"** (I Cor 10: 17). (Pope Benedict Homily May 29, 2005)

The bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ which are, in turn, meant to transform us. Have you ever heard the phrase: you are what you eat? The Lord desires us to be transformed from the imperfect individuals we are, into the Body of Christ. Our evangelical brethren often speak of an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus. How much more personal and intimate can you get than to receive the Lord's body into our own physical bodies that we may become Him whom we receive!