

Body and Blood of Christ

Ex. 24: 3-8; Ps. 116; Heb. 9: 11-15; Mk. 14: 12-16, 22-26

The 1960s were the golden age of television westerns. There were so many programs that were set in the old west: Gunsmoke, Bonanza, Rawhide, The Rifleman, Death Valley Days, The Lone Ranger...and on and on. In many cases, the white men were shown battling the native Americans (we called them Indians in those days). But occasionally, a white man and an Indian developed a mutual respect and even became friends.

Sometimes, the Indian would suggest that he and the white man should become 'blood brothers' so each of them would take knives and cut their arms. They would bring the two wounds together so that the blood mixed and conferred a life-long bond, a bond not to be broken. Even if the television audience knew nothing about this practice, they could tell that the ceremony was a very serious and significant event.

Blood is featured in the Scripture readings for this Sunday, the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. Moses read out to the Israelites the laws and ordinances that he had received from God. The people heard the words and vowed: 'All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.' Then Moses took the blood of sacrificed animals and 'dashed it' against the altar and on the people to seal the covenant between God and His people. The people would be obedient to God and He would protect them and care for them forever.

Of course we know that the Israelites were not faithful to the covenant. Many times they sinned by turning away from God and breaking the solemn bond. Eventually God sent His Son to live among His people to teach them about the kingdom of God. Also, Jesus preached a return to the original precepts given to Moses, love of God and love of neighbour. Ultimately, Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for the Jewish people.

St. John Chrysostom said that the Passover meal in the time of Moses was a 'type' and the sacrifice of Jesus was the 'reality'. He said that: 'If the type was able to free a people from bondage (to the Egyptians), much more would the reality liberate the world (from the bonds of sin and death). As the old covenant had been ratified by the blood of sheep and calves, so the new covenant was ratified by the blood of the Lord.'

At the Passover meal that Jesus ate with His disciples before He was to suffer His Passion and death, He instituted the Holy Eucharist when He offered them His Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine. And we partake of this holy meal every time we come to Mass. When the priest extends his hands over the bread and wine at the Eucharistic Prayer, we believe that the bread and wine are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ.

Various polls have shown that a great many Catholics do not believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. We have difficulty in 'wrapping our minds around' the mysterious transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood. We are limited by our frail human intellect to an approach stated by Hercule Poirot, that fictional detective born out of the mind of Agatha Christie: 'It is the brain, the little gray cells on which one must rely.' Unfortunately, even the great Poirot would fail to unravel the infinite mystery that is God by relying on the powers of the human mind. In the end, we must take it on faith.

For those of us who believe, we know that Jesus has kept His promise not to leave us orphans. When Jesus came into the world God said that He would be called Emmanuel, 'God with us'. When we receive the Holy Eucharist at Mass, we know that indeed God is with us. Jesus abides in us and we in Him.