

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ June 26, 2011

Readings: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; John 6:51-58

Better Than We Deserve

Over my years here, when many of you have asked how I am or how I am doing, I have responded with the line from Dave Ramsey: *“Better than I deserve.”* It’s a response that reflects all the blessings I have received from God through no merit of my own. And one of those blessings is a fairly active metabolism—I can eat just about anything I want without too much worry about counting calories and putting on weight. There is a downside, however. Sometimes it leads to eating improperly in other ways other than calories. And so when I went to the doctor a few years ago for a physical, I received the news that my cholesterol had spiked considerably. The doctor immediately wanted to prescribe medication, but I convinced him to give me three months to bring down my levels by diet and exercise. A big part of my approach was eating oatmeal for breakfast every day. After three months I reached my goal, but this daily oatmeal regimen had become quite tiresome.

And then I thought of the people I had met in Haiti who were happy to have simply a small portion of rice to eat each and every day. I thought of the Israelites who ate manna for 40 years in the desert. And I realized that eating a daily bowl of oatmeal was a pretty small sacrifice compared to what the Haitians and Israelites had to endure. I ate oatmeal to improve my health and maybe extend my life. The people of Haiti eat rice and the Israelites ate manna simply to survive; to maintain their physical lives. But we hear today in our reading from Deuteronomy that *“not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD.”*

We need food to maintain our physical lives, but we also need the word of God to sustain our spiritual lives. The bible is like a large loaf of bread that gives us sustenance. To help us digest it a little bit more easily, the Church breaks that loaf into smaller, bite-sized, morsels and offers them to us in the Liturgy of the Word when we come to Mass on Sunday and during the week. We are slowly fed most of the Bible over the three-year cycle of readings the Church has developed. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* states: *“The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s word.”* The word of God is indeed rich fare that we receive from this ambo, the table of God’s word. And to help us digest that spiritual bread so that we can more fully receive the nutrition and strength that it contains, the Church also specifies that each Sunday Mass should have a homily to help that word of God impact our daily lives. Again quoting the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*: *“By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text.”*

Eating oatmeal, or rice, or manna is important for our physical well-being even though their taste can become tiresome. Consuming the word of God is important for our spiritual well-being, even though sometimes we find it tiresome or don’t like the taste of the message. For example, young couples who want to live together outside of marriage don’t like to hear in Scriptures that fornication is a sin. We hear the messages that we should love our enemies, or turn the other cheek, and we are sometimes left with a bad taste in our mouths, and we want to spit the food back out. We hear God’s commandment: *“Thou shalt not kill.”* And then some still vote for

politicians who support abortion or euthanasia because those politicians offer promises of job security, tax breaks, or government handouts. We often put our physical desires ahead of our spiritual health by rejecting God's word. It's sometimes hard to appreciate the food that we know deep down is good for us.

We come to Mass and consume rich fare at the table of God's word. And then we consume the Word of God Himself at the altar, the table of the Eucharist. About this Eucharistic meal, St. Thomas Aquinas states: ***“O precious and wonderful banquet, that brings us salvation and contains all sweetness....Under the old law it was the flesh of calves and goats that was offered, but here Christ Himself, the true God, is set before us as our food. What could be more wonderful than this?”*** Indeed, what could be more wonderful than this?

Jesus came down from heaven and offered His life for our salvation; to atone for the sin of Adam and Eve. And when we reflect on that original sin of Adam and Eve we see another story about food. It ties in well with our theme for today. Adam and Eve were not satisfied with the food God had given them. They were unwilling to listen to the word of God. Like us, God had given them much more than they deserved. They were doing better than they deserved and yet they wanted more. How often do we act this way? They wanted to be like God, and so they listened to Satan, and disobeyed God, and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

To make things right, Jesus humbled Himself to take on our humanity, to take on our human flesh and blood. And then He instituted the Eucharist so that we can consume His Body and Blood each time we come to Mass. And by this action we can share in His divinity. Again quoting St. Thomas: ***“He assumed our nature in order that by becoming man he might make men gods.”*** Jesus became a man so that we might become gods.

We have the opportunity to receive the gift that Adam and Eve sought after way back in the Garden of Eden. We can share in Christ's divinity. When we participate in the Body and Blood of Christ, we become one with Christ and one with each other. Our gospel gives us some of the effects of this wonderful gift that Jesus offers us. Jesus tells us that if we eat His Body and drink His Blood that:

- We will have life within us.
- We will have everlasting life.
- He will raise us on the last day.
- He will remain in us and us in Him.

Come to Mass each Sunday with a healthy appetite. No calories or cholesterol here, only pure nutrition. Be hungry to consume God's message for you as you listen to His words in scripture. Be hungry for the Body and Blood of Christ so that Jesus will be in you and you in Him. This food will sustain you and give you the strength to follow His Father's commands. This food will give us eternal life. We will be doing much better than we deserve.

Deacon Joe Hulway