

## The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ – Cycle A May 25, 2008

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

### Brought Together by a Meal

When Mass is over today, I'm going to be in a little bit of a hurry to get home to finish up preparations for our annual Memorial Day weekend chicken barbeque. My mother and father will be there, as will my three brothers and two sisters and their families and extended families. And our kids make a special effort to come back home for this celebration every year and invite many of their old friends as well. It is very much a reunion that everyone anticipates to kick off the summer. Preparing and sharing a meal is usually the key to a successful reunion; it has a special unifying effect. So this afternoon, after I pick up the keg of beer, my brothers and I, along with a team of recruits, will grill twenty-four chickens for a crowd which is estimated at about seventy adults and children. Everyone pitches in with the preparation of the dinner and then we can all sit back, relax, and enjoy each other's company.

Eating meals together regularly with our immediate families is also very important. Unfortunately, our society doesn't have the same emphasis on this as it once did. I think this has contributed to a lot of the problems today and has weakened the family unit. There is something about sitting down around the dinner table that encourages and builds unity in the family. It's hard to sit across the table from someone you're angry with and still enjoy your dinner. People can be at odds with each other and still live in the same house together, but sharing meals is a little more difficult; it encourages reconciliation. The food goes down easier and tastes better when the family members are at peace with one another. You've heard the expression: "The family that prays together, stays together." I'd like to offer a corollary: "The family that eats together grows together."

Today we celebrate the Sunday after Trinity Sunday, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Last week we reflected on the love and unity of the three Persons of the Trinity, and today we celebrate the love and unity we have with each other and with God. And this unity is celebrated by sharing a meal. St. Paul tells us that we are brought together by sharing the Eucharist. He says: "***Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body for we all partake of the one loaf.***" And the Catechism tells us: "***The whole Church is united with the offering and intercession of Christ.***" (CCC #1369) We are all one family sharing a meal that brings us together; the whole Church, the communion of saints, the living and dead.

Through the Eucharist we are united in a special way to each other, but in an even more mysterious way we are also united to Christ because it is His Body and Blood that is our food. He comes into our bodies and becomes part of us. St. Paul asks: "***The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ?***" And, of course the answer is: "Yes." This is what Jesus told His disciples as we heard in this morning's gospel story. Jesus says: "***For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.***"

What a mystery; how difficult to try to comprehend. And it was difficult for many of Jesus' disciples to accept, and many no longer followed Him because of this teaching.

Jesus didn't mean it symbolically, and His followers didn't take it that way.

We come together to share the Eucharistic banquet and we grow in unity with each other and with God. But just as it is difficult to share a family meal when there is not peace in the family, it is important for us to reconcile with each other and with God before we come to communion. At Mass we offer each other a sign of peace as a symbol of this reconciliation with each other. And we hear in Matthew's gospel: ***"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*** (Mt. 5:23-24)

But it is even more important to reconcile with God and ask forgiveness for our sins. At the beginning of Mass we have the Penitential Rite, and our venial sins can be taken away by the actions of the priest and through the reception of communion itself. But our mortal sins require forgiveness through the Sacrament of Penance. The Catechism states: ***"Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion."*** (CCC #1385) If you come to Mass in the state of mortal sin, it is important not to receive communion because this compounds your sinfulness. This is based on the words of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: ***"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself."*** (1 Cor. 11:27-29)

Just like at Mass, eating dinner together with our family will help us grow closer together and reconcile our minor differences, our *venial* differences if you will. But if there is a major break between family members, eating together will cause us indigestion and make our relationship even more sick. It will not result in unity. Healing must come first before you attempt to break bread together.

Reconcile with one another; reconcile with God. I encourage you to try to make your lives a little less busy and hectic so that you have time to share dinner with your family, as often as possible. And I encourage you to try to make your lives a little less busy and hectic so that you have time and energy to attend Mass at least every Sunday and share communion with God's church.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**