

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord: Behold the Lamb of God

“Behold the Lamb of God!” At every Mass, immediately before we receive communion, the celebrant holds up the consecrated host and calls us to make a profession of faith that this is Jesus. “Behold, the Lamb of God. Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.” And we say, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

The celebrant does not say that this is a symbol of the Lamb of God. He says that this is the Lamb of God. We emphatically agree with the celebrant when we say that we are unworthy to have the Lord under our roof, inside of us. And so we receive the Lord and pray to Him in this special presence within us.

Let me tell you about Alice. The importance of focusing on the Presence within her when she went to communion is what Alice realized when she made a decision as to what parish she would join. Alice was 20 years old. She had been active in her high school youth program and was a fixture at the Teen Mass and on the various retreats for the young people. She attended community college for her first two years, and was quite busy with both a job and with school, but these didn't prevent her from becoming a chaperone for the high school Teens. But at the end of those two years, she had to leave her parish. She was accepted in one of the universities in Boston, one that had specialized courses in a field that intrigued her.

Alice was determined that she would not let her leaving home change her faith life. There are a lot of parishes in Boston, some just a brief walk from each other. Alice prayed. She asked God to help her find the parish that would be right for her. She was determined to search out for a parish that would provide her with an experience similar to what she had cherished at home. So from the very first Sunday in the city, Alice began shopping for the right parish. In the first six weeks she went to six different parishes, many recommended by her Catholic classmates. Each parish had a certain strength about it. None, though, could match the experiences she grew up loving. The music was not that good in this parish, but the homilies were inspiring. The homilies were not that good in that parish, but the people seemed so welcoming. Each parish provided a good experience for Alice, but she didn't quite find her place yet.

On the seventh Sunday, Alice had agreed to join her new friends on a trip to the Berkshires to see the fall foliage. They were leaving at 10. Alice still had time to go to the 7:30 Mass at the old church a few blocks from the campus. Her Catholic friends told her that it would be a quick but boring Mass. Still, she went, even though she was not expecting an uplifting experience. When she entered, the church was large, cold and pretty empty. She went to the front of the church. The priest came out with the ringing of a bell. There was no music. The celebrant was elderly. He seemed to get lost a bit in his homily, but he radiated warmth and determination. Alice

thought, "He's a nice old man." There was little appealing in any of the aspects of the celebration unique to that parish. Certainly, nothing that would lend itself to any comparison with the other churches Alice had checked out. So, Alice decided not to critique the parish, but just celebrate the Mass. After all, she went there to be united to Jesus and receive His Body and Blood. Her focus was more on what the Mass was all about rather than the wonderful experiences she was seeking to enhance the Mass.

By the conclusion of the Mass, Alice realized that she had found her parish. She was less concerned with experiences and more concerned with union with God. Her focus was on praying particularly when she received the Eucharist. She would join that parish. After a while she became a lector. The old pastor asked her if she would spend some time with the high school kids. She soon realized he wanted her to start a youth program. Well, this was now her parish, and she wanted the kids in that area to cherish their faith. But most important, she prayed. It was not that she didn't love going to the Teen Mass when she returned home from college, but she had now found her place where she could celebrate and grow in her love of the Eucharist. Alice's prayer had been answered in a way that was completely opposite her expectations.

Quite often, like Alice, we focus on the enhancements to our celebration of Mass and forget why we attend Mass in the first place. We attend Mass to be united with Jesus Christ in the Upper Room at the Last Supper, and on the Hill of Calvary at the Crucifixion of the Lord. We attend Mass to be united with Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic Gift of His Body and Blood.

The Eucharist is one of the Lord's two dying gift to us. The Eucharist is Jesus Christ within us. We receive His Body, His humanity and divinity, we receive His Blood, His saving us on the Cross, and we celebrate the Living Memory of Jesus Christ. We speak to Him within ourselves. And He speaks to us, calling us to unite our pains to His Cross, strengthening us with the eternal Food for the Journey of our Lives.

The Lord's second dying gift to us is Mary as our mother. From the cross Jesus told John, representing us all, to take Mary as our mother. He told Mary to be our mother.

Just on a side note, to me it is significant that these two dying gifts of the Lord, the Eucharist and Mother Mary, are the two parts of our faith that are most challenged by those who are anti-Catholic. It is also significant that the greatest dream of St. John Bosco, Don Bosco, is the dream of the two pillars. In this dream, St. John Bosco saw the Pope guiding the ship of the Church through turbulent waters. In the distance he saw a safe harbor. To enter the harbor the ship had to pass between two columns, one with the Eucharist on top of it and the other with Mary.

The Church gives us this feast, the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord, to remind us that at every Mass we attend we will behold the Lamb of God and have the opportunity to take Him under our roof. We come to Church to pray as the People

of God united in His Presence and united by His Presence.