

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST - Corpus Christi - C

Now that the Church has celebrated Eastertide she gives time to celebrate that great gift left to us by Jesus the night before he died, the gift of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist. In the gospel reading we have Luke's account of the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Twelve baskets full of scraps were collected enough to feed all those brought into the Church by the twelve apostles. Christ will be the everlasting food for his Church. In the first reading the king of Salem, Melchizedek, blesses Abraham. In the second reading we have Paul's account of the Last Supper.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Genesis the first book in the Bible and the first book of the Pentateuch, the five books of the Jewish Law. The book's origins are still uncertain, it speaks of mankind's beginnings, 1-11, and then the history of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob until their arrival in Egypt. The book is a composite of three documents, the Yahwist, (J), the Elohist, (E) and the Priestly, (P), that go to make up the book of Genesis whose authorship, although attributed to Moses, is unknown. The Yahwistic tradition has a lively and vivid style and although God is described in human terms the author has a deep sense of the divine. The Elohist tradition (*elohim* means God) is more sober in style with an exacting moral code and an insistence on the distance separating human beings from God. The Priestly tradition contributes laws and is particularly concerned with the organization of the sanctuary, with sacrifices and festivals and with the person of Aaron, the priest, and his descendants. This is the tradition of the priests of the Temple of Jerusalem. The Yahwist and Elohist were possibly written down in the reign of Solomon c.950 BC, whereas the Priestly was not codified until the Exile, 587-538, and added to the Pentateuch after the return from exile.

The reading, 14.18-20, introduces us to Melchizedek the mysterious king of Salem (Jerusalem), mysterious because he suddenly appears gives his blessing and as quickly disappears never to be mentioned again. Following a series of wars between rival kings in which Lot, Abram's nephew was captured Abram set off with his retainers and defeats the victorious kings recovering 'Lot and his possessions together with his women and people.' Melchizedek appears bringing bread and wine and we are told he 'was a priest of God Most High.' He blesses Abram which is effective and irrevocable since God confers the blessing. Melchizedek blesses God too, praising his greatness and goodness, two types of blessings. The Israelite liturgy contained both. Abram gives Melchizedek a tenth of all his possessions showing Abram recognises Melchizedek's priesthood. The responsorial psalm which follows presents Melchizedek as a figure of King David who is himself a figure of the Messiah who is both priest and king. Melchizedek is shown with the characteristics of a post-exilic high priest, heir to the prerogatives of the monarch and head of the priesthood to whom Abraham and his descendants pay their tithes.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 109.1-4, is a psalm of the priest Messiah and is the first psalm of Second Vespers every Sunday. Just as the priest Melchizedek received his priesthood from on high, 'a priest of God Most High' first reading, so the prerogatives of the Messiah are worldwide sovereignty and a perpetual priesthood. These prerogatives are echoed in the verses of the psalm and in the response.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, of marriage and virginity, of liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, of charisms, of matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to use all these problems as a vehicle to expound the profound doctrines of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross which is the one true wisdom.

The reading, 11.23-26, has Paul dealing with the problems occurring in the liturgy in the church at Corinth, decorum in public worship. Paul has spoken about women's behavior at services in the first part of the chapter then he turns to the community gathering for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. He says he has heard that there are factions among them and that some of them are getting drunk while others go hungry. We must remember at this time the Eucharist was celebrated in the course of a meal similar to the Last Supper. Paul then gives the teaching he has received on the Last Supper which is where our reading begins. Paul's account would appear to go back to the very earliest traditions about the Eucharist. He concludes with these words to the Corinthians, 'anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.' Our reading concentrates on Paul's teaching on the Eucharist.