

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

This feast is kept at this time, just before we return to ordinary time, because there was not sufficient liturgical time to show our appreciation of this wonderful gift during Holy Week. The gospel reading takes us back to Holy Week, to the Last Supper preparations and, while Jesus and the disciples are gathered round that Supper table, Jesus gives them the wonderful gift of his own Body and Blood as the real food of life. The first reading records the Covenant God made with Moses and how the Israelites accepted that Covenant, the Ten Commandments. The second reading teaches us all that Christ, our high priest, has achieved for us now he is at God's right hand.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible and the second book of the Law. This book has two main themes: the deliverance from Egypt and the Covenant God made with the Israelites at Mt Sinai through Moses, the two are connected by the journey through the desert. Like the book of Genesis, Exodus is a compilation of three earlier documents and our reading today comes from the Elohist tradition. This tradition has not the lively, vivid style of the Yahwist, being more sober with an exacting moral code and maintaining a respectable distance between God and man.

Today's reading, 24.3-8, deals with the ratification of the Covenant. The commands and ordinances, or words and laws, which Moses reads to all the people, in the first sentence, refer to the Ten Commandments listed in chapter 20. The words of God having been accepted and put into writing, Moses orders communion sacrifices to be offered to the Lord. In a communion sacrifice, unlike a holocaust when the whole victim is offered to God by burning, only part of the victim is offered to God, the other part is eaten by those offering the communion sacrifice. On repeating their willingness to live by God's commandments, Moses binds the people into the Covenant by sprinkling them with some of the sacrificial blood. We can appreciate a similarity between what happened at the foot of Mt Sinai, where having listened to God's word the people share in the communion sacrifice, and ourselves at Mass today. We first listen to God's word and hopefully accept all that we have heard and then go on to offer with the priest and share in the eternal communion sacrifice.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 115.12-13,15-18, is part of a psalm which inspires confidence and therefore trust in God. With the psalmist we ask: How can we repay the Lord for all the goodness he has shown? With the priest at Mass we raise the chalice of salvation and call on the Lord's name. In the second verse we can think of Christ's death, he is the faithful one and God indeed loosened him from the bonds of death. In the third verse, following Christ, we can join in offering his sacrifice, call on the Lord's name and fulfill every promise we have made to the Lord.

The **Second Reading** is from the letter to the Hebrews. This wonderful letter to the Jewish Christians was for a time attributed to Paul's pen but now this is considered not to be the case although he is considered to have had some indirect influence on the letter's contents. It would seem from internal evidence that the letter was written about 67AD. The letter is addressed to Jewish people who have a good knowledge of the covenant God made with their people, and who became Christians. They left Jerusalem and with an uncertain faith, they yearn for the splendour of the ceremonies carried out in the Temple. They are tempted to revert to Judaism, but the writer is intent on preventing this by helping them to see their new life in Christ. They are on a new exodus to the Promised Land (heaven), with Christ, not Moses, as their leader whose one sacrifice on the Cross replaces the many sacrifices of the old priesthood. The letter is a good teaching letter for us showing the harmony between the Old and New Testaments.

The reading, 9.11-15, comes from the section of the letter where the writer is intent on pointing out to his readers the superiority of the worship which can now be offered as a result of Christ's death and Resurrection. He has been at pains to point out from the beginning of the letter the greatness of Christ, the incarnate Son of God. That he is the faithful and merciful High Priest who alone can offer authentic worship, higher than any offered under the old dispensation. Christ is the new priesthood, with his own new sanctuary 'at the right of the throne of divine Majesty in the heavens,' the mediator of a greater Covenant. In the reading, which now begins, the writer points out even more clearly that now Christ has come, he is the high priest of all the blessings we are to receive. He has not entered an earthly tent, but the heavenly sanctuary, 'once and for all....having won an eternal redemption for us.' The first reading told us how Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the sacrifice, now we are sprinkled with the blood of Christ which purifies us and enables us to 'do our service to the living God.' The reading concludes with two points. Christ is the mediator of a new covenant so that all who follow Christ may receive the promised inheritance, and, Christ's death cancelled out the sins against the earlier covenant. This is the Christ whose Body and Blood we receive on this great feast.

