

## THE SOLEMNITY OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

This Sunday we keep the feast of Corpus Christi transferred from the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. The gospel reading is part of Jesus teaching on the Eucharist which he gave in the synagogue in Capernaum. The first reading comes from the book of Deuteronomy, God feeds the Israelites with manna in the desert and the second reading is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he is teaching about the Eucharist.

The **First Reading** is from the fifth book of the Law, the book of Deuteronomy. This book as the name suggests is a second law book and is distinct from the other four books of the Law in that, apart from chapters 31 and 34, it comes from a single written tradition: the Deuteronomistic. This tradition has a distinctive style and its teaching constantly reaffirms that of all nations in the world, God has, out of pure love, chosen Israel to be his people, but this choice and the Covenant made with his people ratifying this choice are conditional on Israel giving allegiance exclusively to God, and to the prescribed worship to be offered to God in one single place of worship. The book is a code of civil and religious laws which are framed within a long discourse of Moses. The concluding chapters deal with the final days of Moses, the commissioning of Joshua to succeed Moses and Moses' death in sight of the Promised Land. The Deuteronomistic code is a partial restatement of the laws promulgated in the desert and recalls the great events of the Exodus, of Sinai and of the beginnings of the conquest of the Promised Land. Later the principles of Moses were re-thought by the prophets and adapted to the situation of the Israelites living in Palestine 600 years after Moses. After the fall of Samaria, 721, the book was stored away in the Temple in Jerusalem to be rediscovered in the reign of Josiah, 622. It was re-edited at the beginning of the Exile 587 and came to be regarded as a code of law laid down in his final years by Moses in Moab.

The reading, 8:2-3,14-16, is part of Moses' discourse to the Israelites before the Deuteronomistic code. It is a type of catechetical teaching dealing with the Ten Commandments, the love of God and loyalty because of God's love for them. Our reading tells of the ordeals the Israelites had to suffer in the desert. They were led by God but were tested and humbled by God so that he could know their inmost thoughts. He fed them with manna, 'bread from heaven', to make them understand that it is God's word that gives life. They must not forget the Lord their God and all his good deeds for them. The reading makes mention of these, and for us today we think of the manna with which God fed the Israelites in the desert.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 147, celebrates God as the liberator of Israel, the creator, and friend of the lowly. The verses we say are from the second part of the psalm where we thank God for giving us his protection, establishing peace and feeding us with finest wheat, for us a reference to the Eucharistic bread. We must be happy that God has sent out his word to us and we have heard his word and been able to receive it. Not every one is as fortunate.

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 1 Corinthians 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, marriage and virginity, liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, charisms, matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to turn use all these problems into a vehicle for the profound doctrine 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, and there is only one true wisdom.

The reading, 10:16-17, is taken from the section where Paul is speaking about the dedication of food to false gods. In the previous section Paul has already warned the Corinthians about what happened to their ancestors in the desert when they set their hearts on evil things, worshipping false gods, putting God to the test and complaining against him. "They were killed by the Destroyer." Paul warns against the worship of false gods and asks them to consider carefully what he has to say and this is where our reading begins. The cup we share and the loaf we break together is a sharing in the body and blood of Christ and though we are many, this sharing in Christ makes us one body. Paul continues with his teaching against eating food sacrificed to idols. He tells the Corinthians "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons as well; you cannot have a share in the Lord's table and the table of demons as well." If you have time read the whole of chapter ten to put our short reading into context. The reading brings out our unity in Christ which is a unity of faith signified by our "Amen" as we receive Christ's Body and Blood in communion.