

## **THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (CORPUS CHRISTI) (6/13-14/2009)**

*Exodus 24/3-8, Psalm 116, Hebrews 9/11-15, Mark 14/12-26*

The Easter season ended on Pentecost Sunday, two weeks ago.

Yet, in my sometimes addled liturgical understanding, I consider this feast, Corpus Christi, to be the actual close of the paschal season, but don't tell the liturgists!

Today's celebration highlights the Body and Blood of the Lord and bids us pause to consider this wonderful gift the Lord has given us in the Mass.

A number of the families in our parish opt to have their children "make" their first Holy Communion individually at a regular Sunday Mass.

Others prefer the traditional First Communion Mass done with a group of other students.

Either way, I often wonder what the children are thinking as they receive the Lord.

And I wonder what their parents are thinking as well.

And I wonder what the congregation, including the priest, is thinking.

What is it we believe about the visible bread and the wine once the priest pronounces the words of Jesus "This is my body," and "This is my blood"?

Based on the Scriptures, the Church teaches that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus, though not the historical body and blood Jesus had two thousand years ago.

The body and blood we receive are the same body and blood Jesus, the resurrected Jesus Christ, has at this moment in the presence of his Father.

But that is only a part of what the Eucharist is.

Fr. Joseph Donders, in his book "Liberation, the Jesus Mode", tells a story of a French priest in the first world war serving in the French army, not as a chaplain, but as a stretcher bearer in the medical corps; the priest was Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who was later to become a famous author, paleontologist, theologian and mystic.

In a small box in his pocket one day, he was carrying a consecrated Host, and just before he and his comrades were preparing for a major battle, Fr. Pierre received the Host.

After that, he had a "vision" as it were; he saw himself reaching out to grasp Christ who was in the Host; but each time he reached out, Christ would elude his grasp.

Instead, in his hands, he would find a wounded soldier, or a poor person, or a pitiable human being, someone who needed help.

When he "awoke" from the vision, he realized that he would only fully draw closer to Christ when he accepted the tasks God set before him, e.g., to take care of others.

That story helps us understand the various aspects of Holy Communion.

The sacrament of the Eucharist deepens our personal relationship to Jesus in the most intimate of ways;

He becomes part of us and we of Him.

But it also strengthens our relationship to the people around us, to the People of God, the Church, and especially to those who are in need of our help, whoever they may be.

Receiving Holy Communion is not just between me and God.

It embraces Christ and you and me and all God's people!