

Corpus Christi

1. Here at St. Joseph's it has been the custom to offer the cup to everyone on this feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord. In other parishes it is offered more frequently, even weekly or daily. Of course many people don't take the cup even when it is offered, and for a number of different reasons. Some people, for example, just don't like the idea of everyone drinking out of the same cup. We are more conscious of germs these days. Some people won't even shake hands anymore.

2. But I was thinking of the reaction a stranger might have to our Eucharistic celebration if he came to Mass today and was told that we receive the cup as the blood of Christ. He might feel uneasy, even revolted or disgusted, for who in his or her right mind drinks blood? What is wrong with these people, he would probably be saying to himself. Then we would attempt to explain to him that we are not actually drinking blood. But then we would be stuck because the person would say: Oh, so the wine is simply a reminder, a symbol of Jesus' blood. And we would respond: Well, no, it is the blood of the Lord, but not in a physical sense. And we would go on and on, attempting to tell this visitor that while the

wine is more than just a reminder of the Lord's blood, we don't feel that we are drinking Jesus' physical blood.

3. Such a visit might be good for us, because it might make us think about what we are doing when we celebrate the Eucharist. We do believe that Jesus is present to us in the consecrated bread and wine. Therefore, we do believe that his presence in these elements is more than just a reminder. And while we might reject the visitor if he said the consecrated bread and wine are just symbols, theologians would then contradict us. They would tell us that Jesus' presence in the bread and wine is symbolic, but then they would teach us that they understand the word symbol to mean that these physical realities make Jesus' spiritual reality present to us in the way that our bodies make our spirits present to others. Rahner talked about real symbols. Real symbols are physical realities which make a spiritual reality present. Our bodies are such for our spirits. The bread and wine are such for the Lord Jesus. They allow him to be present to us in a physical way.

4. But when the Lord Jesus handed the cup of wine to his disciples and identified it for them as his blood, what was he saying? He was saying that he was going to pour out his blood for them, that is, he was going to die for them. That was the meaning of the gesture.

That is the meaning of this real symbol. We drink the cup as his blood to remind ourselves of the fact that Jesus has poured out his blood for us, has given his life for us. Therefore, we receive the cup in gratitude, and in receiving it we of course also implicitly promise to do the same for him. If he poured out his blood, his life, for us, we must pour out our blood, our lives, for him. And so the apostle Paul warns us to be clear about what we are doing when we accept the cup as Jesus' blood poured out for us. We are committing ourselves to do the same. Similarly, when we receive the consecrated bread as the body of Christ, we are receiving his body as the body that was given us for us. Therefore we are again warned to be clear about what we are doing when we accept the bread as the Lord's body given up for us. We are committing ourselves to do the same for him.

5. One more thought for this feast. It is given to us in today's second reading. Paul says to us: "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." Since we have all committed ourselves to the same person, Jesus, we are made one in him. Indeed, we become his body. So the word body can be applied to us as well as to the host. We are the body of Christ. We Catholics are accustomed to show respect for the consecrated bread by genuflecting and bowing before it and by

acting reverently in its presence. Should we not do the same with reach other, for we are all members of his body? We, the community, are the body of the Lord. So let us reverence each other. Yes, we should reverence every single person as sacred, but we should show special reverence for those who have committed themselves to Jesus in faith and are therefore his body, our fellow Catholics, first of all, and then other Christians. Sociologically there has been a change in our Catholic world. When we were young, perhaps everyone in our neighborhood or school was Catholic, and when everyone is Catholic, no one is. But things are different now. Now it is going to matter more if someone else is a Catholic. It will be like finding a brother or sister in a crowd of strangers. And we should rejoice in our identity as members of the body of Jesus. Sometimes when I go to the hospital on call, I want to shout out, “Is there a Catholic here?” because often no one acknowledges my identity as a Catholic priest and I therefore presume that no one there is Catholic. But when it does happen, you can rest assured that I am very pleased to find another Catholic.

6. When we walk out of this church this morning, the body of Jesus in its many parts is walking out into the world. Let us be the part of Jesus that we are called to be as a member of his body, and

let us be grateful for the other parts of his body who are laboring with us in the world. Let us acknowledge each other as such and in that way build up the body of Christ in the world.