

## Fr. Jeff's Weekly Homily

### Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ May 25, 2008

#### **READING 1: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16b**

He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, in order to show you that not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD.

#### **Psalm 147**

Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.

#### **READING 2: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17**

Brothers and sisters: The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

#### **GOSPEL: John 6:51-58**

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.

In tonight's Gospel, people asked, "how can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They liked Jesus, thought he had a lot of good things to say, but this was more than they were ready to believe. They'd have preferred he give them something less challenging. Some left him after this. But those who stayed received the most precious of gifts, Jesus made it clear when he said, "Whoever does not eat my Body and drink my Blood will not have life and whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day." At the Last Supper, he took the bread, broke it, handed it to his disciples and said, "This is my body" and he took the wine at the end of the meal and said, "This is my blood." I think it is interesting that it seems Judas was present to receive the body of Jesus in the bread, but left before the blood was received in the wine. The bread nourishes; the blood opens us to share in the sacrifice. I read a lot about what people are seeking. It seems people are interested in spirituality but not religion. Well, (*duh!*), of course—people want all the good feelings but none of the sacrifice. Oh, yes, Jesus knew what he was saying was challenging and so did the Christians who continued to discover him in the bread and wine consecrated by the apostolic leaders who we call priests today. St. Paul wrote about it in today's second reading written about 25 years after the Resurrection, saying, this bread, this wine are

a participation in the body and blood of Christ. All through the centuries, the Holy Body and Blood we receive today has been received as the Body and Blood of Christ through the ministry of priests.

We celebrated four funerals here in this past week. We really don't know what the family and friends of the deceased will be like at funerals; sometimes the only people who know the responses are the choir. But this week, all generations of the families from children to grandchildren to great grandchildren came to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, fully participating in the Mass. At one funeral the oldest son, a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, spoke at the end for the family. He began with a faith statement about the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of his Savior for the complete man, which is how he described his dad.

In your kindness I am going to ask everyone to allow me to share some very personal thoughts about priesthood. It's for everyone, but especially the men. Because we have been confused by events, we don't talk much about priesthood but without priesthood, there's no Eucharist. I was ordained nineteen years ago and five years before that I entered the seminary. When I told my parents what I was going to do, they thought I was crazy. They said, "Why? You've got it made and priests are so unhappy." My closest friends said they didn't understand it, but they hoped this would make me happy. My Cursillo friends were thrilled. It didn't matter, though, I couldn't have done this if I was going to worry about what everybody else thought about it. Do you think it's crazy to answer Jesus' call? On the cross he said, "I thirst." It wasn't for a drink of water; Jesus is thirsting for the souls of people. He thirsts to heal people where we most need healing, he thirsts to give himself to people. Do you think it's crazy that Jesus would be calling you to the front lines in the war against evil? Some doubt it's a war but the people who live in Southwest Gainesville are patently aware this week that evil attacks good. But if you ever doubt the war is raging, walk a week with me and experience the casualties, the brutality is not always so obvious but it is always happening. This is Memorial Day weekend, established to remember our nation's heroes. My friend, Fr. Ron, said the most surprising thing to him in Iraq was that the soldiers, grubby, smelly, a bit rough on the edges, who were ready to die for their fellow soldiers, were happiest to see the soldier who doesn't carry a gun, the padre who carried the Body of Christ to them so that whatever happened to their bodies, Jesus Body was within. The war against evil is universal; the battle is raging; Jesus needs priests who will fight against the one who would like to destroy good souls. The Body of Christ needs some heroes. The Body and Blood of Christ needs good priests.

Has anyone ever given you an especially precious gift? A wonderful woman named Josephine gave me this chalice. I think of her every time I celebrate Mass with it. But not only her, now, after so many years, I remember the priests and deacons who have shared it, the Eucharistic ministers and the people of Queen of Peace Community, some still here, some who have moved and some who have gone on. It is not the beauty of the object but the lives and memories that are contained with it. The Body and Blood of Christ is our most precious gift and our most powerful weapon. Some found it too much to believe and left Jesus. Some find it too much to believe today and

leave. Some want all the good feelings and none of the sacrifice. In just a few moments, I will murmur the most magnificent words ever spoken: This is my Body, given up for you; this is my Blood poured out for you and for all believers, that is a victory for Jesus and Good News.

*Fr. Jeff McGowan  
Queen of Peace Catholic Community  
Gainesville, Florida*