

Homily—Most Holy Body & Blood of Christ, Year B

Exodus 24:3-8

Hebrews 9:11-15

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

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The word, *covenant*, appears in all three of our readings today. This is a very important concept in Scripture and in salvation history. Simply put, a covenant is a deep and abiding agreement between two parties. In Scripture, God makes a covenant with his people, promising on his own authority that he will be faithful to them in providing for them and in saving them from sin. Of course, a covenant requires our fidelity as well. In the old covenant, the people were required to keep the law in all of its details— something they, in fact, were unable to do. The old covenant was sealed with the blood of sacrificial animals, offered again and again, year after year, on the altar of the Temple. This was to teach the people that only God can forgive sins and restore a right relationship between himself and the human race.

The new covenant is sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ offered in sacrifice upon the altar of the cross. This covenant is renewed every time the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered upon the altars of our churches. It's fulfillment does not depend upon what we are able to accomplish. Rather, because of his infinite goodness and power, the new covenant our Lord makes with us is fulfilled entirely through his grace. For our part, we remain faithful to this covenant by relying upon God's grace to turn away from sin, to practice virtue, and to seek his forgiveness if we should fall. Only our stubborn refusal to accept God's love can cause this covenant to fail in its effects. So infinite is the merit of Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, that he cannot break this new and eternal covenant which he has made with us.

Each time we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the New Covenant is renewed, Calvary is made present to us, and the Lamb, slain yet living for ever, comes among us and within us in the full reality of his being— body and blood, soul and divinity, whole and entire. This is why we kneel as we come into his presence, and as he, through the power of the Holy Spirit, transforms the ordinary elements of bread and wine into his own most precious Body and Blood. Kneeling is a sign of humility, but it is also a sign of adoration— it is our physical expression of profound worship before the God who loves us and saves us. We kneel during the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass because at the heart of this prayer are Jesus' own words of institution— “this is my body, this is the blood of the new covenant”. At that moment, the transformation takes place, the sacrifice is re-presented, and the covenant is renewed. This is also the moment in every Mass where there is a brief period of adoration as the priest elevates the sacred species for the people to see and to worship. Many of the faithful still practice the beautiful custom of silently echoing the words of the apostle Thomas, “my Lord and my God,” as they gaze upon the Body and Blood of Christ. It is also customary to kneel after we recite the Lamb of God. And then, after each one of us has made his individual Communion, most of us spend some time kneeling in silent adoration. Some have attempted to suppress these customs, but I assure you they are still permitted and they are still officially encouraged.

Another occasion in which we kneel before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is when the consecrated host is exposed in the monstrance upon the altar for our adoration and to receive the Eucharistic blessing. I'm keeping the homily very short because I would like us to have the opportunity to adore the Lord in this way at the close of Mass today, if even for just a few minutes. When we worship the Lord in this way it's as if that moment from the Mass— that moment when the priest holds up the consecrated elements— is frozen in time and is extended a bit so that the reality of Christ's presence can really sink in to our hearts and minds.

As we worship the Lord on this solemnity of Corpus Christi, I invite you to express to him your gratitude for this incredible gift of his real presence among us, and to renew your commitment to faithfully keep his covenant through a life dedicated to bringing his presence to the world.