

*Readings*

Ex 24:3-8

Ps 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18

Heb 9:11-15

Mk 14:12-16, 22-26

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Having grown up the son of a butcher, I had my share of watching the slaughter of animals, not for sacrifice but for consumption by the customers that appeared weekly in my father's store to purchase what was once a cow, pig, or chicken. As a young boy, I was first frightened by my father's profession, so I can only imagine the reaction of young Jewish children witnessing the sacrifice of lambs and goats as part of their religious tradition.

As we gather around the table of the Lord on this the **Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ**, we hear many references in our first two readings related to the covenant and the blood used in sacrificial offerings to God.

Attempting to understand our faith-traditions or customs begins at a very young age. We recently watched our parish children receive their first communion. I often wonder what they see and believe when they receive the Eucharist for the first time. What might go through their minds? In reality, this same question could be posed to each and every one of us as we receive the Eucharist.

I recall vividly the theology class I had many years ago on the Eucharist and the amount of time we spent on the phrase “*once and for all.*” This short phrase not only connects us to an understanding of the ancient practice of animal sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures but leads us

into the new and eternal covenant as we celebrate the Eucharist with an unbloody sacrifice because of what Christ has done for us, once and for all.

As a Church, we are in the closing months of a Eucharistic Revival. A time to re-examine our understanding of what the Body and Blood of Christ really means for us, as the people of God. This revival comes at a time when many believers have fallen away from the Church and admittedly no longer believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. There are many ways in which we can devote our thoughts to what the Eucharist means to us individually and as a Church. *Gratitude* and *Thanksgiving* are words closely connected to our ability to deepen our awareness, not only of what the word Eucharist means but the very nature of our response to our participation in this mystery of faith.

If we do not enter the celebration of the Mass or Adoration of the Eucharist with a sense of gratitude, then we begin at a disadvantage celebrating what we are actually called to do during these rituals. The power of the Eucharist to forgive sin is made known to us throughout the liturgy. This is one of the many reasons we are grateful when we gather in prayer. The grace we receive from this Sacrament is yet another reason for our gratitude. As we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we become what we receive, going forth from Mass to deepen our commitment as a disciple of Christ. Each time we receive communion we assent to a new level of gratitude if we remain conscious of the gifts attached to our celebration as individuals and a community. The Eucharist sustains us in our faith as food sustains the body. This unbloody sacrifice offered once and for all through the death and resurrection of Christ helps us to grow in faith, leading us to a more profound relationship with our God.

As unworthy as our attempts at gratitude can be for what we receive from the Lord, we

need to be aware of the gradual increase of spiritual knowledge and energy that comes from our meager attempt at thankfulness. We must learn to never take for granted the gift of the Eucharist, as a source of our spiritual nourishment. This once and for all sacrifice of Christ transports us from the rituals of the Old Testament to a new and profound understanding that has moved the Church forward since those moments when Christ offered himself as the one true sacrifice for all humankind. Let us in the true spirit of our Eucharistic Revival and in the words of St. Augustine, recognize who we are when we look upon the consecrated host and the cup of salvation, becoming what we receive, the Body of Christ.