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CORPUS CHRISTI

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, June 8th, 2023)

*Qui manducat meam carnem, et bibit meum sanguinem
in me manet, et ego in eo.*

He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood
abideth in Me: and I in him.
(*Jn 6:56*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

THIS MORNING'S Gospel is taken from the Discourse on the Bread of life, pronounced by the Lord shortly after the first multiplication of the loaves. After the miracle in Cana, after curing the royal official's son, then the paralytic of the Bethzatha pool, this miracle is the fourth sign reported by St. John. It was performed by Jesus on the top of a mountain, on the side of the Sea of Tiberias opposite to Capernaum, when the Passover of the Jews was near. A crowd of about five thousand men had followed Jesus. After seeing the miracle, those men said, "This is of a truth the prophet that is to come into the world."^a

a. Jn 6:14.

Knowing that the crowd intended to come and make Him king by force, Jesus withdraws into the mountain. Once evening has come, the disciples go back to Capernaum in their boats. When they arrive, the Lord comes to them walking on the sea.

The day after, the crowd, having realised the absence of the Lord and the disciples, goes back to Capernaum. Jesus is in the

synagogue. They strike up a dialogue, which is going to turn into a teaching on the Eucharist.

Jesus points out that what is drawing back the crowd to Him is not faith sustained by signs, but the hope of a new food multiplication. Then comes a first invitation:

a. Jn 6:27. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting, which the Son of man will give you.^a

Whereas the multiplication of the loaves miracle should have been sufficient, the crowd asks for a new sign confirming Jesus' first remark. The Lord continues:

b. Jn 6:33-35. For the bread of God is that which cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world. [...] I am the bread of life. He that cometh to Me shall not hunger: and he that believeth in Me shall never thirst.^b

Once again, the Lord provokingly leads His interlocutors to make an act of faith. His words are shocking for many who know that He is but the son of Joseph, that His father and mother are known. In His answer, Jesus specifies that an act of faith is a gift from God: "No man can come to Me, except the Father, who hath sent Me, draw him."^c

And He confirms:

d. V. 51. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world.^d

e. V. 52. The question then remains: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"^e Many disciples recriminate, and, scandalised, will eventually leave the Lord.

The Discourse on the Bread of life poses the key question for a Christian, that of the faith in the Lord's words, faith in the Eucharist:

f. 1 Cor 11:29. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.^f

Jesus' words, which were already shocking some Jews in the time of Jesus, have many times during the Church history been misunderstood, leading many Christians into error.

St. Paul invites those who receive communion to discern the Body and Blood of the Lord under the species of the bread and wine. The rule given to the Corinthians remains topical: discerning this food from other foods, distinguishing this meal from other meals. The Mass is not primarily the place for listening to the word of God, the place for teaching. It is the place where the Paschal mystery is made present. It is the place for sacramental communion with Christ. Rites are there to help us discern this presence.

The chant of the *Sanctus*, taken in part from Prophet Isaiah's inaugural vision, is the gateway into the Canon. We unite ourselves to the chant of angels, who never cease to proclaim the glory of God.

Once the *Sanctus* is ended, the priest enters into the recitation of the Canon, the core of which is constituted by the words of the consecration. At that moment, the priest pronounces Jesus' very words during the Last Supper. The mystery of the Cross is made present. Bread becomes the body of the Lord, and wine His blood.

The recitation of the Canon is shrouded in silence. It is regrettable that in many places there is a feeling of obligation to fill this silence, which is, according to the beautiful remark of a Father Abbot, the iconostasis, so to speak, of the Roman rite. It emphasises the sacredness of what is taking place. At this moment, nothing is common or profane. Everything is sacred.

Later, at the moment of sacramental communion, the faithful will once more be invited to discern the body of the Lord. Discerning, however, doesn't mean renouncing to receive holy communion. The Eucharist is not a reward for the strong, but a food for the poor, the bread for those who, despite the toil, wish to keep walking on the road:

*Panis Angelorum, factus cibus viatorum,
Vere panis filiorum, non mittendus canibus.*

Bread of angels, made the food of travellers,
Truly the bread of children, not to be thrown to dogs. ^a

^a. Sequence of the Mass.

Finally, during solemn or private adoration, the faithful is once again invited to discern the body and blood of the Lord.

Discerning this presence is a gift from God. We should prepare ourselves for it by imploring a renewal of our faith.

Mary, who gave us her Son in the crib, presides over each of our communions. May she on our behalf always bring to her Son this prayer made by Benedict XVI on the day of his first communion: “I would like to be always with Thee, but above all, Thou, be with me.”¹

The crowd of the multiplication of the loaves wanted to make a king in the eyes of the world. As to Jesus, He wants to be King of our hearts. Through communion, let us taste the Lord: “He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me: and I in him.”

Amen, Alleluia.



1. BENEDICT XVI, *Le jour de ma première communion [The Day of my First Communion]*, Mame, p. 8.