

8. June 2023

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
"The Treasure of the Holy Mass"

Jn 6:51-58

"Jesus said to the Jews: I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.' Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Jesus replied to them: In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person. As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me. This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever."

What a grace for us men and women that these words of the Lord are fulfilled in the celebration of Holy Mass! There, we are nourished by both "Tables" of the Lord: the Table of His Word and the Table of the Holy Eucharist.

Throughout the history of the Church, this event has taken shape in marvellous and diverse liturgies, which have always been celebrated with great reverence. This reverence, together with great love and deep gratitude, must convey to us the greatness of the event, for it is none other than God Himself who comes to meet us in this holy nourishment, wishing to unify Himself with us. It is not simply a bread that we receive in commemoration of the Lord, nor is it an agape in which we lovingly share our bread with others; rather, it is the mystery through which God wants to come to us and dwell in us in a tangible way. Certainly there are other ways through which He can do this; but the Holy Eucharist is the preferred way: *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person."*

In order to have a share in this mystery in the Catholic Church, certain conditions must be fulfilled. One of them is that we must be Catholics and believe in the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion. We must also be in a state of grace. This shows us that participation in Holy Mass is the consummation of the faith of the members of the Body of Christ, and is not in the first instance a missionary event, to lead non-believers to faith.

In the early history of the Church, this was very clear. Catechumens, i.e. those who were preparing to receive holy baptism, were admitted to what we would call today the "celebration of the Word", but they had to leave before the actual "Eucharistic celebration" took place. They could then be fed at the Table of the Word, but not yet at the sacrifice, until they became full members of the Catholic Church through baptism and thus fulfilled the conditions for receiving Holy Communion.

In this context, I would like to share a personal testimony.

In the year 1977, I had the grace to convert to the Lord Jesus and subsequently He led me to the Catholic Church - an unforgettable moment!

I took my first steps in Catholicism in a community where the "Novus Ordo" was celebrated with much reverence and devotion. There I came to know Eucharistic adoration, as well as many other things that are still important in my path of following Christ today.

Over the decades, I continued to attend Holy Mass almost every day. But I found it increasingly painful when priests deviated from what was prescribed in the Missal, when subjective elements were introduced and the music was banal.

This was a real suffering for me, and the only thing that sustained me was to internalise the words we heard in today's Gospel and to wait for the moment of receiving Holy Communion. The situation was certainly different when I participated in Holy Mass in our community, where great care was always taken to ensure that the music also corresponded to the dignity of the event.

Later, when I was in Jerusalem, I had different alternatives for participating in the liturgy. I usually opted either for a Holy Mass celebrated in silence on Calvary, or for

the official Franciscan Holy Mass, which is celebrated in Latin and accompanied by Gregorian chant.

But my spirit and my heart, so to speak, still did not feel totally at home in the liturgy of the Catholic Church. Something was missing, although the celebrations in which I participated were certainly worthy.

On the other hand, I had come to know the beautiful Byzantine liturgies, which moved me deeply, especially those I witnessed on Mount Athos and in Russia. But since I had converted to Catholicism with conviction, the option of joining the Orthodox Church was ruled out beforehand. Occasionally the opportunity arose for me to participate in a liturgy of the Eastern rites that are in communion with Rome, the so-called "Uniate Churches".

Then, a few years ago, I discovered the Traditional or Tridentine Holy Mass, and I began to love it more and more. It was not "love at first sight", but a growing love. When I experienced the so-called "cantata Mass", I knew that I was finally discovering the Roman rite of the Catholic Church in its fullness, in which I felt at home. This is a great gift of God for me! And this treasure I would like to share, precisely on this day of the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. In recent decades, this treasure had been almost totally buried, similar to Gregorian chant, and was even viewed with a certain suspicion.

Without wishing to devalue other rites, I would like to testify that, in the extraordinary form of the Roman rite, there is a most worthy and authentic liturgy within the Holy Church, in which the words of the Lord which we have heard in today's Gospel are brought to life in a sublime and edifying way.