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25 May 2008

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (A)

"Do not forget the LORD, your God" (Deuteronomy 8:). These words of Moses need to resound in our ears every day, for we are often quite forgetful of the Lord.

Remembering the Lord of course entails remembering also everything that he has done for us. To remember the Lord is to keep our hearts and minds fixed upon him, to cry out daily to him, "Alleluia!"

We remember the Lord each time we enter a church and genuflect before our Eucharistic King present in the tabernacle. To bend the knee before the Lord is to adore him in true humility, in faith and in love, believing the words which he himself spoke: "I am the living bread come down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:51).

We must be ever cautious that our external actions are not performed in vain. As we fall down before the Lord externally, we must adore him internally, otherwise our worship is in vain. The Lord seeks those who worship him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). We ought, then, to enter the church quietly and reverently, conscious of whose presence it is that we are entering, and we ought to leave in the same way, grateful for this tremendous gift.

There is no finer way to adore the Lord, to remember him, than to gaze in love upon the Eucharist, his very Body and Blood.

Some count us fools for believing that bread and wine are literally changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and not a mere symbol. Even some among us who have tasted the Bread of Angels have abandoned the Church of Christ and wandered away on paths uncertain.

It has always been thus. Even some who first heard Jesus' words, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53), abandoned him. They thought he was mad and questioned what he meant, thinking he was speaking with exaggeration. But Jesus did not relent.

He did not turn to symbolic language but rather to more vivid, more descriptive language. He insisted upon that which he had spoken: "my flesh is true food and my blood true drink" (John 6:55). Many could not believe this and abandoned him, saying, "This saying is hard; who can accept it" (John 6:60)?

Jesus does not run after them trying to clarify what he meant; he already made it perfectly clear. Instead, he simply asks, "Does this shock you? ...The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe"(John 6:61-64).

It has always been thus. Even some in the time of our beloved patron, Saint Anthony of Padua, found these words of Jesus too difficult to believe. When he was preaching in Rimini, there was a certain heretic with whom Saint Anthony spoke about the Eucharist.

The man was impressed by Saint Anthony's holiness and learning but nonetheless could not believe that what appeared to be bread and wine was, in reality, the true Body and Blood of Christ. At one point the heretic said to the Saint:

Very well, let's drop the discussion and see the deeds. If you, Anthony, manage to show me through a miracle performed in front of everyone that this is the body of Christ, I will renounce every heresy and submit myself to the obedience of faith.¹

Saint Anthony promised to do so. The heretic then gave the framework for the miracle, saying:

I will shut up my donkey for three days until it is all but starved. Three days hence I will bring it out in front of all these people. I will show it its fodder. You stand in front of the animal holding what you claim is the body of Christ. If the animal, starving, ignores the fodder and instead approaches that God Who you say is to be adored by every creature, I will truly believe in the faith of the Church.²

Saint Anthony agreed to this and on the appointed day the people gathered to see what might take place.

¹ Arnaldo de Serranno, *The Book on St. Anthony's Miracles*, Jude Winkler, OFM Conv., trans. and Virgilio Gamboso, ed. (Padua, Italy: Messaggero Di Sant' Antonio - Editrice, 2004), I.3.

² *Ibid.*

The heretic, true to his word, brought his starved donkey and placed its food near it. After celebrating Mass in a nearby church, Saint Anthony brought the Eucharist before the people and silently placed it before the donkey in the sight of everyone.

He then said to the donkey, so that everyone gathered could hear:

In the virtue and in the name of your Creator, whom I, even though I am so unworthy, truly hold in my hands, I tell and command you, o animal, to immediately and humbly draw near and offer Him the veneration due Him. Thus these evil heretics will be persuaded that every creature is subject to their Creator, and that priests regularly hold Him in their hands upon the altar.³

After Saint Anthony said this, the heretic offered the donkey its food, but it would not eat. The donkey, ignoring the food, recognized its Lord - whom we so often ignore - and bent its head and knelt before the Eucharist. After adoring the Body and Blood of the Lord, the donkey ate its food. This donkey recognized the One who rode that other donkey into Jerusalem (cf. Matthew 21:1-11).

Thus, through the prayer of Saint Anthony and through the miracle that the Lord worked through him, the heretic came to believe in the Eucharist, in the Real Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ *Ibid.*

As it was in the time of the Apostles and in the time of Saint Anthony, so it is today. Too many fail to give the Blessed Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, the adoration and veneration it is due. Too often do we fail to be like that donkey!

Too many among us do not believe in the Real Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. Too many have tried to tell Jesus what he meant to say rather than take him at his word. Not recognizing what she truly is, too many have abandoned the Church looking for something else that will satisfy their longings, looking for something that will entertain them. They failed to see and to believe that it is the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ himself, that satisfies our deepest longings by uniting us with the Lord.

It must be said that of all of the teachings of Jesus, the Eucharist is perhaps the most difficult to accept. Yet, who am I to judge the words of the Master? Who am I to say that Jesus was mistaken when he spoke so very clearly? Who am I to leave him who died for me? Is it not possible that one who created all things out of nothing by the word he spoke could change something that exists into something else by the words he speaks?

During this Sesquicentennial year, we are given a profound opportunity to renew our faith in the Eucharistic Lord and to

approach him in the Sacrament of the Altar with greater vigor and devotion.

When the crowds began to leave, Jesus did not stop them; he did not force them to stay with him but, in his love, he allowed them to choose their way. Afterwards, he gathered the Apostles and asked them, "Do also want to leave" (John 6:68)? Peter answered wisely: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:69).

Jesus, our Master, will feed us and satisfy all of our hunger. He knows the longings of our hearts and so he can satisfy them for it is truly he whom we desire and he gives himself to us as our food and drink! The donkey recognized his Lord in the Eucharist, but how often do we? Let us not forget the Lord, our God!

Let us be like that donkey and come before the Lord with humble hearts. Let us follow after Saint Anthony and see in the Eucharist our Lord and God. Let us ever seek to be worthy of him whom we receive. By receiving with joy the Eucharistic Lord, may we come to live with him forever. Amen.