

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (CORPUS CHRISTI)

Deuteronomy = doo-ter-AH-nuh-mee

Moses = MOH-zihz or MOH-zihz

This reading consists of two parts, the first introduced by "Remember," recalling the past of the Israelites, the second introduced by "Do not forget," offering advice about how to proceed.

manna = MAN-uh

Manna is a focus of this reading.

Note the rhythm of the second part of the reading, in which the verb in the phrase is emphasized to lead to a noun related to the Israelites' desert exile.

Once again, manna is mentioned.

LECTIONARY #167

READING I Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy

Moses said to the people:

"Remember how for **forty years now** the **LORD**, your **God**, has **directed** all your **journeying** in the **desert**, so as to **test** you by **affliction** and **find out** whether or **not** it was your **intention** to **keep** his **commandments**.

He **therefore** let you be **afflicted** with **hunger**, and then **fed** you with **manna**, a **food unknown** to you and your **fathers**, in order to **show** you that **not** by **bread alone** does one **live**, but by **every word** that comes **forth** from the **mouth** of the **LORD**.

"Do not forget the **LORD**, your **God**, who **brought** you out of the **land** of **Egypt**, that **place** of **slavery**; who **guided** you through the **vast** and **terrible desert** with its **saraph serpents** and **scorpions**, its **parched** and **waterless ground**; who **brought forth water** for you from the **flinty rock** and **fed** you in the **desert** with **manna**, a **food unknown** to your **fathers**."

READING I The first reading for today's feast is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy. The title of the book means "second law," and it presents Moses as the great law giver. Traditionally, Moses was thought to be the author of this book, but today biblical scholars understand it to have been written over several centuries, starting in the eighth century bc and possibly extending to the exile in the sixth century bc.

Today's reading is part of a unit that begins with the words "Be careful to observe this whole commandment that I

enjoin on you today" (Deuteronomy 8:1). It provides a recollection of the past to urge obedience to the covenant. The recollection is of the manna that God provided to the Israelites in their sojourn in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4-15) and the water from the rock that God provided when the Israelites were thirsty (Exodus 17:1-7). The reward associated with observing the commandments is to live and prosper in the land that was promised to their ancestors.

But Moses observes that the commandments are God's way of teaching discipline to God's people, like a father would

teach his son (see Deuteronomy 8:5). And what does God want to teach the people? He wants them to learn reliance on God so that they never assume that their prosperity comes from their own hands. Thus, the stories of the manna and the water from the rock are perfect illustrations of God's benevolence even to an unruly and grumpy people.

READING II Our second reading is an excerpt from a section of the First Letter to the Corinthians in which Paul warns the community about the dan-

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 147:12–13, 14–15, 19–20 (12)

R. Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.

or

R. Alleluia.

Glorify the LORD, O Jerusalem;
praise your God, O Zion.
For he has strengthened the bars
of your gates;
he has blessed your children within you.

He has granted peace in your borders;
with the best of wheat he fills you.
He sends forth his command to the earth;
swiftly runs his word!

He has proclaimed his word to Jacob,
his statutes and his ordinances to Israel.
He has not done thus for any other nation;
his ordinances he has not made known
to them. Alleluia.

READING II 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

The **cup of blessing** that we bless,
is it **not a participation** in the **blood of Christ?**

The **bread** that we break,
is it **not a participation** in the **body of Christ?**

Because the **loaf of bread** is **one**,
we, though **many**, are **one body**,
for we **all partake** of the **one loaf**.

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

An elegantly simple reading that condenses into its few lines a whole theology of the Eucharist. Emphasis throughout especially on “body,” “blood,” “loaf,” and “cup.”

gers of overconfidence, telling them that even God’s chosen ones can fall into idolatry. He uses the Exodus story to illustrate his point by noting that, while they were in the wilderness, all were given safe passage through the sea and all received the same spiritual nourishment. Thus, the Israelites experienced the same manifestations of God’s benevolence. Despite these miraculous interventions, they grumbled against God and practiced idolatry. They were punished, Paul says, to give an example to others so that they might avoid the temptation of evil things (1 Corinthians 10:1–13).

Transitioning from this general warning about overconfidence, Paul addresses the problem of idolatry more directly. Major social gatherings, such as banquets, games, and other forms of entertainment in Corinth would have involved sacrifices to idols, and these early Christians would have felt compelled to participate, if they wanted to be part of the social scene. But Paul wants the Corinthian community to judge based on their own experience. Which is better or more fulfilling: idol worship or the Eucharist? To make his case, he uses two rhetorical questions that antici-

pate a response of “Yes, of course!” The Greek word translated here as “participation” is *koinonia*, which also means “fellowship or partnership.” Paul uses it frequently to refer to the communion of believers. In today’s more secular society, you might think, “Why can’t the Corinthian Christian community just go ahead and participate in these events?” Paul says, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:21). In other words, you must choose!

TO KEEP IN MIND

Sequences originated as extensions of the sung Alleluia before the proclamation of the Gospel, although they precede the Alleluia now. St. Thomas Aquinas composed the hymn that is now the sequence for the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ in the thirteenth century.

SEQUENCE Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem

Laud, O Zion, your salvation,
Laud with hymns of exultation,
Christ, your king and shepherd true:

Bring him all the praise you know,
He is more than you bestow.
Never can you reach his due.

Special theme for glad thanksgiving
Is the quick'ning and the living
Bread today before you set:

From his hands of old partaken,
As we know, by faith unshaken,
Where the Twelve at supper met.

Full and clear ring out your chanting,
Joy nor sweetest grace be wanting,
From your heart let praises burst:

For today the feast is holden,
When the institution olden
Of that supper was rehearsed.

Here the new law's new oblation,
By the new king's revelation,
Ends the form of ancient rite:

Now the new the old effaces,
Truth away the shadow chases,
Light dispels the gloom of night.

What he did at supper seated,
Christ ordained to be repeated,
His memorial ne'er to cease:

And his rule for guidance taking,
Bread and wine we hallow, making
Thus our sacrifice of peace.

This the truth each Christian learns,
Bread into his flesh he turns,
To his precious blood the wine:

Sight has fail'd, nor thought conceives,
But a dauntless faith believes,
Resting on a pow'r divine.

Here beneath these signs are hidden
Priceless things to sense forbidden;
Signs, not things are all we see:

Blood is poured and flesh is broken,
Yet in either wondrous token
Christ entire we know to be.

Whoso of this food partakes,
Does not rend the Lord nor breaks;
Christ is whole to all that taste:

Thousands are, as one, receivers,
One, as thousands of believers,
Eats of him who cannot waste.

Bad and good the feast are sharing,
Of what divers dooms preparing,
Endless death, or endless life.

Life to these, to those damnation,
See how like participation
Is with unlike issues rife.

When the sacrament is broken,
Doubt not, but believe 'tis spoken,
That each sever'd outward token
doth the very whole contain.

Nought the precious gift divides,
Breaking but the sign betides,
Jesus still the same abides,
still unbroken does remain.

[Shorter form begins here.]

Lo! the angel's food is given
To the pilgrim who has striven;
See the children's bread from heaven,
which on dogs may not be spent.

Truth the ancient types fulfilling,
Isaac bound, a victim willing,
Paschal lamb, its lifeblood spilling,
manna to the fathers sent.

Very bread, good shepherd, tend us,
Jesu, of your love befriend us,
You refresh us, you defend us,
Your eternal goodness send us
In the land of life to see.

You who all things can and know,
Who on earth such food bestow,
Grant us with your saints, though lowest,
Where the heav'nly feast you show,
Fellow heirs and guests to be. Amen.
Alleluia.

GOSPEL

The Gospel reading for today is part of the "Bread of Life" discourse from the Gospel of John, which is often described as a midrash on the sentence "He gave them bread from heaven to eat" (John 6:31), a paraphrase and conflation of Exodus 16:4 and Psalm 78:24. A midrash is a type of Jewish literature in which the author provides commentary on a Scripture text, sometimes taking it apart phrase by phrase or word by word, and giving it a new contemporary meaning.

As a preface to this midrash, the narrator tells us that the crowds try to follow

Jesus after he performs a miracle of multiplying loaves and fishes (John 6:1–15). The next day, they catch up with Jesus again. After a brief conversation about doing the works of God, they ask Jesus for a sign so that they might believe in him, saying, "Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" In the midrash that follows, Jesus clarifies that "he," in this sentence, refers to God not Moses, and "gave" becomes "gives." Also, "bread from heaven" is no longer manna but rather Jesus, who comes from the Father to do God's work.

Today's Gospel is the last part of this midrash, where Jesus explains what "to eat" means. John's Gospel does not have a Last Supper/institution of the Eucharist narrative, but here we have lots of eucharistic imagery: bread, food, flesh, blood, and so on. When Jesus declares that he is the living bread and that "whoever eats this bread will live forever," "the Jews" (i.e., Jewish religious authorities) argue about what this means. In the simplest of terms, they think Jesus is inviting the crowd to be cannibals! The author of John's Gospel regularly uses this literary technique, in which

GOSPEL John 6:51–58

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to the Jewish crowds:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying,

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them,

"Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,

and I will raise him on the last day.

For my flesh is true food,

and my blood is true drink.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

Just as the living Father sent me

and I have life because of the Father,

so also the one who feeds on me

will have life because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven.

Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

A reading that draws out the potent metaphor of Jesus as the "living bread."

Even emphasis on "do not have life." Note the emphasis on "-in" in "within."

Do not sell the strangeness of this promise short. Eating flesh and drinking blood together were strictly forbidden in Jewish dietary laws (and still are for those who keep kosher). In those terms, what Jesus is saying here is appalling.

Slight pause between "Father" and "sent."

Slight pause between "life" and "because."

Jesus says something deliberately ambiguous, and characters in the story understand only the plain meaning of his words, which allows Jesus to explain further. But, in this case, the Johannine Jesus piles on even more offensive language. No wonder people were upset!

The phrase "Amen, amen I say to you" is like saying "Sit up and pay attention! This is important!" The Greek verb *trógó* translated here as "to eat" more often means "to gnaw on or to crunch on." Elsewhere, in this reading, the less repulsive *phago*, meaning "to eat," is used. Consider how these pas-

sages read with this understanding of the difference in "to eat": "Whoever eats (*phago*) my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." "Whoever gnaws on (*trógó*) my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." "The one who feeds on (*trógó*) me will have life because of me." "Whoever crunches on (*trógó*) this bread will live forever."

Although we cannot fully know what the author of this Gospel intended to say with the use of such graphic language, at the very least we can say that Jesus was not a phantom; he was truly incarnated in flesh and blood, which he gave up for our

salvation. We can also say that Jesus continuously invites us to share in this eucharistic experience so that we can remain in him and he in us. This is the fullness of life! C.C.