

A REFLECTION FOR THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

FR JAMES MARTIN SJ - HOW CAN OUR LIVES MIRROR THE EUCHARIST?

...focusing on the Year A - not this year's Year C - readings for Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ - (Dt. 8:2-3, 14b-16a; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; Jn. 6:51-58)

I believe in Transubstantiation, the Catholic doctrine that tells us that during the Mass, the bread and wine that are consecrated by the priest become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, "really and truly" as I was taught before my First Holy Communion. Many Catholics, surveys show, have a hard time believing this, perhaps thinking of it more as "symbolic." For me, that belief has never been much of a problem.

I'm stating that at the outset because there are other ways that the Eucharist inspires me. And on this Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, often called Corpus Christi, I would like to share one of those ways.

Today's Gospel, from John, is taken from the "Bread of Life" discourse, in which Jesus, speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum, his home base for ministry in Galilee, tells his disciples that they will have to "eat of the flesh of the Son of Man" and "drink of his blood," a statement that prompts some of them to leave Jesus. In fairness, it must have been astonishing to hear.

So the Gospel is focused on the Eucharist. The word itself (meaning thanksgiving in Greek) can apply to not only the Eucharistic host itself—the wafer that Catholics consume—but also the overall liturgy.

But there's another aspect of the Eucharist that I find meaningful, and it comes in the words of consecration: "Take this, all of you, and eat of it; this is my Body, which will be given up for you." Lately I've been thinking about these words in a new way.

A friend of mine and his wife, for example, recently welcomed their third child. They are delighted, but they are also tired. My friend "takes" his

body back and forth from the baby's room to the kitchen to the bathroom to the pharmacy to the paediatrician's office, and sometimes his body (and his wife's) doesn't get a whole lot of sleep. Another friend is caring for her ailing, elderly mother, and makes frequent trips to see her. She's tired too, "taking" her body back and forth, across state lines. And sometimes I get tired too! I "take" my body from place to place, from home to office, from talk to talk, and lecture to lecture.

When Jesus said, "Take this, all of you, and eat of it," he was offering his body in the way that we normally think of the Eucharist, which begin as bread and wine. (And isn't it wonderful that the elements that are transformed are so commonplace?)

But Jesus "offered" his body in other ways as well. Before he delivered the Bread of Life discourse, he fed 5,000 people a short distance away and, as if that weren't enough, that night he walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee, during a storm. After he finished the Bread of Life discourse, his brothers say to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do." So he "takes" himself there.

Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus "taking" his body and "offering" or "giving" it to people, in so many different ways. He walks from one town to another, sleeping by the side of the road, eating and drinking with people in their homes, healing the sick, feeding the crowds and raising the dead.

Our lives are never going to be exactly like that of Jesus's. None of us is the sinless Son of God and we're not going to "offer" or "give" our bodies in the Eucharist as Jesus did at the Last Supper. But we certainly know the feeling of "taking" our bodies from place to place, in works of charity and "offering" them in loving service to others. Do this in memory of him.