

Today we celebrate another great mystery of our faith – Corpus Christi, the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. The mystery revealed to us by Christ and the Church is that the whole Christ, body, blood, soul and divinity is here and received under the forms of bread and wine. The doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the most Holy Eucharist is one of those Catholic beliefs that many find difficult to accept. So many people would prefer to say that it is just symbolic and not a reality.

But our whole Catholic tradition from earliest times has always stated the same belief, that it is not a symbol, but a reality – the bread and wine at Mass truly become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

The first reading today from the Book of Exodus and speaks to us about blood and sprinkling in blood. We modern people often have no sense today of blood and how it was used by our ancestors in faith. It sounds alien to us, using the blood of animals in that way. But in the Old Testament blood is a powerful sign of life, and something used to seal a covenant. So we have Moses in the 1st reading killing and burning animals as communion sacrifices, then taking their blood and throwing it over the altar, with the words. This is the

Blood of the Covenant. So the blood of animals was offered in sacrifice for forgiveness of sins.

The second reading is from the Letter to the Hebrews and teaches us that the blood of animals is only temporary. The blood of Christ, however, is forever. Jesus is God and man and His sacrifice of His own life for us carries eternal consequences for all of us.

The Gospel today is from the Gospel of Mark and gives the account of the Last Supper and the words of Jesus: This is my body! This is my blood! So now our first two readings make sense – the blood of Christ is the sacrifice, and we offer in the Mass, for the forgiveness of sins; it is the blood that seals Jesus' new covenant. So we don't need to use animal blood any more because we have the blood of Christ.

So now we know why we have Mass. We have it because Jesus told us to. We have it because through his blood we are redeemed, we know the forgiveness of our sins. Not a symbol of his blood, but the real thing. When we come to Mass we know Jesus is with us, because he promised that when we come together in church and bring up bread and wine, they become his Body and Blood when the priest says the prayer of thanks over them.

Part of this prayer of thanks are the words of Jesus himself - he said "This is my body, this is my blood, do this in memory of me. We believe his words. We trust what he says will be true. Not just symbolically, but really.

So when we receive Holy Communion, it is Jesus himself we are receiving, his Body. The Church, from the earliest times has worshipped the Eucharist as something very holy, the Blessed Sacrament, we call it.

We don't need to remember to eat – we get hungry, and this reminds us that we need our next meal. But we do have to remember to gather with the Church to share in Jesus' eucharistic meal. So many find it easy or convenient to ignore their spiritual hunger. Although it's a different kind of food to the bread that is meant to fill us up when we are hungry. The food we eat at Mass does not fill our stomachs, it fills up our hearts – it fills us up with Jesus' love, it is spiritual food. In that little round host is contained all the love that Jesus wants to give us.

All we have to do is say "yes" to this gift; So when we come to Mass and receive communion, we are saying yes to all that Jesus wants to give us.

When the cares of life overtake us, or when we want to do other things, it is possible for us to forget – so

sometimes we need a gentle reminder of how much God has done for us, and the small duty of praise and thanksgiving we owe him in return. And not just duty, but an act of grateful love.