

## FIRST READING – A BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

A reading from the book of Deutronomy.

Moses spoke to the people:

“Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments.

He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.”



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – A BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

Brothers and sisters,  
the cup of blessing that we bless,  
is it not a sharing in the Blood of Christ?

The bread that we break,  
is it not a sharing in the Body of Christ?

Because there is one bread,  
we who are many are one body,  
for we all partake of the one bread.



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – A BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

The Lord be with you.

*And also with you.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

*Glory to you, O Lord*

Jesus said to the crowds:

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

The people then disputed among themselves, saying,  
“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

So Jesus said to them,  
“Very truly, I tell you,  
unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,  
you have no life in you.

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,  
and I will raise them up on the last day;  
for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.  
Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me,  
and I in them.

“Just as the living Father sent me,  
and I live because of the Father,  
so whoever eats me will live because of me.  
This is the bread that came down from heaven,  
not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died.  
But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Jesus said these things  
while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## THE SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Anglicans have certain reservations about this Sunday's provisions. Many of them would use a set of propers provided for the Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion on the previous Thursday, but few would want its propers to replace those of this Sunday. They also express some reservation about doctrinal feasts (but see Trinity Sunday!) as opposed to the anamnesis of events in salvation history.

Nevertheless, the very genius of Scripture ensures that the readings set forth saving events rather than doctrines. And whatever may be the official status of *An Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine*, published in 1971 by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, one can at least go forward with the confidence that many of us talk what is very largely a common language about this subject.

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### **Reading I: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a**

This passage comes from a recital of the events of the exodus and of the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert. It recalls especially the trials to which the people were exposed—hunger, thirst, fiery serpents, and scorpions—and the provisions that Y(HWH) made to relieve them: the water from the rock and the manna.

Paul himself treated the water from the rock and the manna as types of the two great Christian sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion ([1 Corinthians 10:1-4](#)); and in the discourse of the bread from heaven in John 6, part of which will be read as the gospel of this day, the manna is likewise treated as a type of the eucharistic bread.

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### **Responsorial Psalm: 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20\***

The same selection of verses from Psalm 147 is provided for the second Sunday after Christmas. It is appropriate for any festal occasion, but its particular relevance to Corpus Christi is found in the second line of the second stanza: “he fills you with the finest of wheat.”

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### **Reading II: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17**

One might have expected that the second reading for this solemnity would be [1 Corinthians 10:1-4](#), in which Paul interprets the manna of Deuteronomy 8 typologically of the Eucharist. Instead, we have a eucharistic passage from a later point in the same chapter.

It is becoming the commonly accepted view that in verse 16, Paul is quoting a traditional eucharistic formula. This is indicated by the quite Jewish expression “the cup of blessing.” The verb “we bless” is also Jewish (*berakah*) and contrasts with Paul's usual preference for the Greek equivalent, *eucharistein*, “to give thanks.”

The idea of “participation” [*koinonia*] in the body/blood is probably also Pauline, though Hellenistic, and represents an exegesis of the words over the bread and the cup. *Koinonia* has not merely a symbolic but a strong realistic sense.

“Body and blood” refer not to things in themselves but to an event and a person—to Christ giving himself in his redemptive death. In Holy Communion he offers real participation in himself as he

gives himself to his sacrificial death.

This language draws out explicitly the meaning of his words and actions at the Last Supper.

People have often wondered why the usual order—bread/cup—is reversed here and have sometimes speculated that there were early communities that celebrated the Eucharist in this order. This is hardly likely, for Paul himself cites another traditional formula in chapter 11 with the normal order—bread/cup.

The reversal must be explained from the fact that Paul wishes to give further comment of his own upon the bread/body word and drops the cup/blood word out of the picture.

For verse 17 has to be seen as Pauline comment. And it involves a remarkable shift of sense. The word “body,” used christologically and sacramentally in the traditional formula, is now taken up in an ecclesiological sense.

“we,” the community that participates in Christ’s sacramental Body in the Supper. “Participation in Jesus and his (sacramental) body” becomes identical with incorporation into the church as the Body of Christ (Ernst Käsemann).

Doubtless Paul is led to this exegetical step because of the difficulties at Corinth, which he will elaborate upon in the next chapter. The Corinthians held an all too individualistic attitude toward the Eucharist. For them, it was a guarantee of personal salvation.

For Paul, however, it binds one not only to Christ but also to one’s neighbors, to the Christian community, with all the obligations that entails. The Eucharist has a horizontal as well as a vertical direction.

It was this passage that inspired St. Augustine to write his well-known words: “If you wish to understand the body of Christ, hear the Apostle speaking to the faithful: ‘Now you are the body and members of Christ.’ If you, then, are the body and members of Christ, your mystery is laid on the Table of the Lord, your mystery you receive” (Letter 272).

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### **Gospel: John 6:51-58**

The bread discourse from John 6 has been much discussed in recent years. The problems are: (1) Is the whole discourse eucharistic? (2) Are only verses 51c-58 eucharistic? (3) Are verses 51c-58 a later addition to the text?

It is clear that verse 51c (“and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh”) represents a turning point in the discourse. The first part speaks throughout of the bread from heaven as typified by the manna. “Eating” is then a metaphor for faith.

The word “flesh,” introduced for the first time in verse 51c, *could* also refer to the Incarnation rather than to the Eucharist, though the words “will give for the life of the world” extend the thought beyond the Incarnation itself to the atoning death.

But when we get to verse 53, which speaks not only of eating the flesh but also of drinking the Blood of the Son of Man, the eucharistic reference is beyond all doubt. This led Bultmann to regard verses 51c-58 as an interpolation by an ecclesiastical redactor.

In the view of the present writer, the discourse is to be viewed as an integrated whole, without resort to the interpolation hypothesis. The background of the whole chapter is the early church's celebration of the Eucharist proper in the context of a meal.

The first part of the discourse, down through verse 51b, which focuses on the bread from heaven, is, we would suggest, a meditation on the agape.

The second half, verses 51c-58, is a meditation on the Eucharist proper and is based on a Johannine tradition of the institution narrative.

Looked at from another perspective, the whole discourse outlines the events of salvation history, the coming of the Christ as the bread from heaven into the world in the Incarnation (vv. 26-51b), the surrender of himself in his atoning death (v. 51c), the availability of his surrendered life as the nourishment of the faithful in Holy Communion (vv. 53-58).

John does not regard the sacrament as a thing in itself, detached from the total saving event of Christ, but as the means by which this saving event is constantly made available for present participation in the life of the church.

We note, too, how in Johannine idiom the double aspect of the Eucharist expressed in the earlier institution narratives (Paul and the Synoptists) is preserved.

The Eucharist makes the past present for participation ("flesh" and "blood" referring back to Christ's death on Calvary), and it makes the future ("I will raise them up at the last day"; "will live because of me"; and "will live for ever") equally present ("has eternal life").

Note also that the eucharistic part of the discourse does not lose sight of the manna typology: "not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died."

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