

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF THE EASTER SEASON

14-20 April 2024

- Sun. **The Third Sunday in the Easter Season**
April 14 **BELIEVING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST**
 A Reflection based on a Sermon by St. Augustine
- Mon. **Monday of the Third Week of Easter**
15 **ALWAYS RETURN TO THE FIRST ENCOUNTER**
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17 **LIVING COMMUNION WITH CHRIST**
 A Reflection taken from **The Mystery of the Church** by Fr. Ives Congar
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19 **THE BREAD OF LIFE**
 **From the Homily of Pope Francis During the Pastoral Visit to
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20 **REVERENCING THE SACRAMENT OF JESUS' BODY & BLOOD**
 A Reflection developed from a Sermon of St. John Chrysostom

Sunday

BELIEVING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

A Reflection based on a Sermon by St. Augustine

Christ rose from the tomb with his wounds. He knew it would be good for his disciples if he retained the wounds. He knew this would help heal the wound in their hearts! What wound am I talking about? It is the wound of disbelief. So, he should show "himself" to them to heal this! What does the word "himself" mean here? It means that he showed himself as Head of the Church, head of the Body of Christ, as St. Paul calls it. Christ foresaw the Church would extend throughout the world, a vision that his disciples couldn't yet share but he saw more too.

In showing himself to them as Head of the Church he was promising them the Body but listen to his next words: All these things I told you while I was still among you as a mortal among mortals. But now I no longer live among you as I did before. If we are to understand these marvelous words, we must reflect on what the Church is, as the community of those who love God more than anything or anyone else, and a community of those who love one another as they love themselves. It is a community of mutual love of a kind never before seen.

After showing himself to them, Christ opened the disciples' minds to understand the Scriptures. They had to understand it had been decreed by God that the Christ should suffer, both Head and Body, and that Christ should rise from the dead on the Third Day. The disciples had seen him suffer and now, after his resurrection, they saw him standing in front of them alive. What, then, caused their disbelief? Their inability to see the Body that is the Church as God willed it. They had renounced seeking life and joy in all the old ways; they had declared they would cling to God alone. But they didn't see the mutual love with which God would surround and support them; they saw Christ but not the Church.

Nevertheless, Christ promised the Church to them and called them to preach repentance to every nation on earth for the forgiveness of sins. Only by turning wholly to God do we find the grace to do this, and we do it convincingly only if we love one another as Christ has loved us. Now you who listen to me find yourself in a situation not unlike that of the first disciples. What was invisible to them is visible to you, but all too often the Church isn't a community of unconditional and total love for one another in God. Seeing Christ's Risen Body, they needed to see his Mystical Body, while we see his Mystical Body but have to believe in it as risen with Christ.

When we live as Christ's Body, we reveal the Risen Christ. To us is revealed the whole Christ when we truly live as members of this Mystical Body. What we need to see is its completion in mutual support and love. For this we need the grace that enables one to keep on loving God first and unconditionally and then to love one another in that same love. Love as Christ loved and all will believe.

Monday

ALWAYS RETURN TO THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

From the Homily of Pope Francis on Monday, 27 April 2020

The people who had heard Jesus during the whole day, and who then had the grace of the multiplication of the loaves and had seen the power of Jesus, wanted to make Him king. First they went to Jesus to listen to His word, and also to ask for the healing of the sick. They stayed to listen to Jesus the entire day without getting bored, without tiring: they were there, happy. When they then saw that Jesus gave them something to eat, something that they did not expect, they were keen to make Him king. Their intention had changed, because they saw and they thought, "Well... because a person who performs this miracle, who gives His people food to eat, could be a good governor" (cf. Jn 6:1-15). But they had forgotten at that moment the enthusiasm that Jesus' word had provoked in their hearts.

Jesus makes them return to their first sentiment, what they were feeling before the multiplication of the loaves when they were listening to the word of God: "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled" (v. 26). Jesus reveals their intention and says, "But you have changed your attitude". And instead of justifying themselves, they were humble. Jesus continues, "Do not work for bread that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on Him the Father, God Himself, has set His seal" (v. 27). And being good, they asked Him, "What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants?" (v. 29). And Jesus says, "Believe in the Son of God" (v. 28). This is an example of how Jesus corrects the attitude of the people, because as they were journeying they gradually strayed from that first moment, from the first spiritual consolation, and took a path that was not the right one, a path more worldly than evangelical.

This makes us understand how many times we have started out on the path of following Jesus, and then halfway down the road we get another idea, we see some sign or other, and we stray and conform to something more temporal, more material, more worldly and we lose the memory of that first enthusiasm we had when we heard Jesus speak. The Lord always makes us return to that first encounter, the first moment when He looked at us, and He inspired in us the desire to follow Him.

This is a grace to ask of the Lord because in life we will always have this temptation to stray because we see something else and we distance ourselves. The grace to return to the first call, the first moment, the first encounter: to not forget my history, when Jesus looked at me with love and made me understand what the path of the Gospel is. Among the things that Jesus says on the morning of the Resurrection has always struck me that He says, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (see Mt 28:10). Galilee was the place of the first meeting with Jesus. Each of us has our own Galilee within us, that specific moment in which Jesus drew near to us and told us, "Follow me". What happens to those people happens to us and then we distance ourselves and we seek other values, and we lose the freshness of the first call. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews refers to this: "Remember the days past" (see Heb 10:32). Memory, the memory of the first encounter, the memory of "my Galilee", when the Lord looked at me with love and said, "Follow me".

Tuesday

THE BODY OF THE LORD

First Admonition by Saint Francis of Assisi

The Lord Jesus says to his disciples : *I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; and from now on you shall know him, and have seen him. Philip says to him: Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. Jesus says to him: Am I with you so long a time, and still you do not know me? Philip, he who sees me sees my Father also* (Jo 14, 6-9). The Father dwells in unapproachable light (1Tim 6,16) and God is spirit (Jo 4,24) and no one has ever seen God (Jo 1,18). Hence only in spirit can he be seen, *for it is the spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer* (Jo 6,63). Yet neither is the Son, in as much as he is equal to the Father, seen by any one other than by the Father, other than by the Holy Spirit. Wherefore, all those who saw the Lord Jesus according to humanity and did not see and believe according to the spirit and the divinity that he is the true Son of God, were condemned. So also now all those who behold the sacrament which is sanctified by the words of the Lord upon the altar at the hand of the priest in the form of bread and wine, and do not see and believe according to the spirit and divinity that it is truly the most holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, are condemned. This the Most High Himself attests, who says: *This is my body and the blood of my New Testament* (Mk 14,22-24) and: *who feeds on my Flesh and drinks my Blood will have everlasting life* (Jo 6,55). Wherefore the spirit of the Lord, who dwells in his faithful ones, He it is who receives the most holy body and blood of the Lord. All others who do not share of that spirit and presume to receive him eat and drink judgment to themselves (1Cor 11,29).

Wherefore, *O you sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart?* (Ps 4,3). Why do you not recognize the truth and believe in the Son of God (Jo 9,35)? Behold: daily he humbles himself (Phil 2,8) as when from heaven's royal throne (Wisd 18,15) he came down into the womb of the Virgin. Daily he himself comes to us with like humility; daily he descends from the bosom of the Father (Jo 1,18; 6,38) upon the altar in the hands of the priest. And as he appeared to the Apostles in true flesh, so now also he shows himself to us in the sacred bread. And as they by their bodily sight saw only his flesh, yet contemplating him with the eyes of the spirit believed him to be very God, so we also, as we see our bodily eyes the bread and wine, are to see and firmly believe that it is his most holy body and blood living and true. And in this way the Lord is always with his faithful, as he himself says: *Behold I am with you until the end of the world* (Mt 28,20).

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You gave us the Eucharist as the memorial of your suffering and death. May our worship of this sacrament of your body and blood help us to experience the salvation you won for us and the peace of the kingdom where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday

LIVING COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

A Reflection taken from The Mystery of the Church by Fr. Ives Congar

“Jesus said to the crowds, I am the living bread which has come down from heaven; anyone who eats this bread will live forever”. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the redemptive mystery of the cross and the sacrament of the unity of the Mystical Body. By its grace, this body is brought into being. In this sacrament, we receive Christ as our food. We thus unite ourselves in a special union similar to that of a living being and its food. Ordinarily, a living being assimilates its food and makes it part of its own substance. But here the roles are reversed. We feed on the eucharistic bread and wine but all the power of assimilation resides in Christ and in feeding us he unites us and incorporates us into his life.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine pointed out that Christ declares, *“Eat me and grow in stature; but it is not you who will change me into yourself, as you do bodily food, but it is I who will change you into me.”* (Book VII, 10) The union with Christ which results, an infinitely mysterious one, is like the union which takes place in a living thing. It is both an incorporation and an intensification of life. As we have seen, our Lord compares in a most explicit way the union he wishes to establish between us and himself, especially through the eucharist, to the unity existing between him and his Heavenly Father. But this is a unity of perfect life, a substantial unity of life.

The Eucharist is, then, the perfect sacrament of our incorporation with Christ. Theologians are unanimous in holding that its special effect is to bring about the unity of the Mystical Body. By a special increase of grace and of living faith, it incorporates us with Christ precisely inasmuch as it takes us into the supreme act of love by which Christ offered himself for us on the cross, so as to bring together into one all God’s children, scattered far and wide.

We may not communicate in isolation from our brothers and sisters. We communicate in the true Body of Christ only by communicating at the same time in his Mystical Body. The “breaking of the Bread” brings with it, inseparably, the presence of Christ uniting us with that multitude that shares in Christ’s redemption. The one bread makes us one body; though we are numerically many. Here we have the entire mystery of the Mystical Body. But it is not a mere fact but a call and command and promise. Living the unity of this Body is salvation.

Thursday

THE LIVING BREAD

From the Homily of Pope Francis During the Apostolic Journey to Bulgaria and North Macedonia on 7 May 2019

In the Gospel, a crowd had gathered around Jesus. They had just seen the multiplication of the loaves; it was one of those events that remained etched in the mind and heart of the first community of disciples. There had been a party: a feast that showed God's superabundant generosity and concern for his children, who became brothers and sisters in the sharing of bread. Let us imagine for a moment that crowd. Something had changed. For a few moments, those thirsting and silent people who followed Jesus in search of a word were able to touch with their hands and feel in their bodies the miracle of a fraternity capable of satisfying superabundantly.

The Lord came to give life to the world. He always does so in a way that defies the narrowness of our calculations, the mediocrity of our expectations and the superficiality of our rationalizations. A way that questions our viewpoints and our certainties, while inviting us to move to a new horizon enabling us to view reality in a different way. He is the living Bread come down from heaven, who tells us: "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst".

All those people discovered that hunger for bread has other names too: hunger for God, hunger for fraternity, hunger for encounter and a shared feast.

We have become accustomed to eating the stale bread of disinformation and ending up as prisoners of dishonor, labels and ignominy. We thought that conformism would satisfy our thirst, yet we ended up drinking only indifference and insensitivity. We fed ourselves on dreams of splendor and grandeur, and ended up consuming distraction, insularity and solitude. We gorged ourselves on networking, and lost the taste of fraternity. We looked for quick and safe results, only to find ourselves overwhelmed by impatience and anxiety. As prisoners of a virtual reality, we lost the taste and flavor of the truly real.

Let us not be afraid to say it clearly: Lord, we are hungry. We are hungry, Lord, for the bread of your word, which can open up our insularity and our solitude. We are hungry, Lord, for an experience of fraternity in which indifference, dishonor and ignominy will not fill our tables or take pride of place in our homes. We are hungry, Lord, for encounters where your word can raise hope, awaken tenderness and sensitize the heart by opening paths of transformation and conversion.

We are hungry, Lord, to experience, like that crowd, the multiplication of your mercy, which can break down our stereotypes and communicate the Father's compassion for each person, especially those for whom no one cares: the forgotten or despised. Let us not be afraid to say it clearly: we are hungry for bread, Lord: the bread of your word, the bread of fraternity.

In every Eucharist, the Lord breaks and shares himself. He invites us to break and share ourselves together with him, and to be part of that miraculous multiplication that desires to reach out and touch, with tenderness and compassion, every corner of this city, this country, and this land.

Friday

THE BREAD OF LIFE

From the Homily of Pope Francis During the Pastoral Visit to Alessano (Lecce) and to Molfetta (Bari) on 8 April 2018

In the Gospel Jesus adds: “He who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57). As if to say: one who is nourished by the Eucharist assimilates the Lord’s very mentality. He is *Bread broken* for us and those who receive it become in turn broken bread, which is not leavened with pride, but is given to others: they stop living for themselves, for success, to gain something or to become someone, but live for Jesus and like Jesus, that is, for others. *Living for* is the mark of one who eats this Bread, the ‘trademark’ of a Christian. *Living for*. It could be displayed as a notice outside every church: ‘After Mass, we no longer live for ourselves, but for others’. I We can ask ourselves: is this Sacrament fulfilled in me? More concretely: do I just like to be served at the Lord’s Table or do I get up to serve like the Lord? In life, do I give what I receive at Mass? And as a Church let us ask ourselves: after receiving Communion many times, have we become people of communion?

The Bread of Life, the broken Bread is indeed also *Bread of Peace*. “Peace does not come when one just takes his bread and goes and eats it on his own.... Peace is something more: it is sharing”. It is “eating bread together with others, without distinction, sitting down at the table with different people”, where “the other is a face to discover, to contemplate, to caress”. Because conflicts and all wars “are rooted in the gradual fading of faces”. And we who share this Bread of unity and of peace are called to love every face; to mend every tear; to be, always and everywhere, builders of peace.

Along with Bread, *the Word*. The Gospel records harsh disputes over Jesus’ words: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (Jn 6:52). There is an air of defeatism in these words. So many of our words resemble these: how can the Gospel solve the world’s problems? What use is it to do good amid so much evil? And thus we fall into the error of those people, paralyzed in disputation over Jesus’ words, rather than ready to accept the change of life that he asks for. They did not understand that the Word of Jesus is for journeying in life, not for sitting down to talk about what does or does not work. The pedants who sum up the pros and cons. Those who cautiously calculate to the very last before acting”. We should not respond to Jesus according to calculations and current convenience; let us respond with the ‘yes’ of our whole life. He does not seek our reflection but our conversion. He aims at the heart.

The Word of God itself suggests it. In the First Reading, the Risen Jesus addresses Saul and does not offer subtle reasoning, but asks him to bet his life on it. He tells him: “Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:6). First and foremost: “Rise”. The first thing to avoid is remaining on the ground, giving in to events, being gripped by fear. ‘Stand up!’, because “it is not licit to be before the Risen One unless you are on your feet”. Always standing, looking on high, because an apostle of Jesus cannot get by on little satisfactions.

The Lord then says to Saul: “enter the city”. He also says to each of us: ‘Go, do not remain locked in your comforting spaces; take risks!’. ‘Take risks!’. Christian life should be invested in Jesus and spent for others. After meeting the Risen One one cannot wait; one must not delay; one must go, go out, despite all the problems and uncertainties. We see for example Saul who, after speaking with Jesus, despite being blind, gets up and enters the city.

Saturday

REVERENCING THE SACRAMENT OF JESUS' BODY & BLOOD **A Reflection developed from a Sermon of St. John Chrysostom**

Sages from the East came and paid homage to Christ's body, even though it was a baby's body. Foreigners who did not worship the One True God left their homes by reason of an interpretation of the appearance of a new star in heaven and came to worship Jesus in great fear and trembling. We are "citizens of Heaven", Scripture tells us. We should imitate what the Sages did. They only saw Christ as a baby. They didn't see anything of what we see. Yet they approached Jesus with profound awe and reverence. You see him on an altar, offered by a chosen priest, and upon offerings of bread and wine you see by faith the Holy Spirit bountifully poured out upon Christ. You, unlike the sages, see more than Christ's body; you know Christ's power and through him you know God's entire plan of salvation. You have been carefully instructed and so you know of the marvels he performed.

Well, then, are we awakening in ourselves a feeling of awe and reverence even greater than the Eastern sages showed? Coming to the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood is not something to do casually or thoughtlessly. Yet failing to share in this sacramental meal is spiritual hunger and death. This is food that strengthens us. It emboldens us to speak freely to our God and of our God. It is hope, salvation, light and life for us. If we go to the next world strengthened by this sacrifice we enter its gates with perfect confidence, as though one were protected all over by armor of steel covered with gold. But why do I speak of the next world? It is because this sacrament transforms earth into Heaven for you.

Would you like to throw open the gates of Heaven, or even of the Heaven of the Heavens? If you did and then looked through them what would you see? You would see Heaven's most precious possession! But I can point to it right here on earth. I needn't point to angels or archangels or to the Heaven of the Heavens but only to their Lord—the Lord of all. Here on earth, we gaze on what is most precious of all. We not only gaze on it but we touch it, we even eat it, we take it in our hands and we carry it with us to our homes when we leave the church.

What is essential in our reverence toward Christ present with us and for us? It is essential that we cleanse ourselves inwardly, cleanse our souls and not just our bodies. It is essential that we ask Christ to send upon us the Spirit that it may cleanse us in ways we cannot cleanse ourselves. What we need to do is cast away all sin. What we need to do is let the love of Christ enter our hearts and use our entire selves in loving even as he has loved us. That is how one approaches the Body and Blood of Christ. It is given for our strengthening in saving faith and love. It is given for sharing of faith and showing love for our neighbor. It is given so we may become other Christs. Christ gave us his flesh and blood to eat in order to deepen our love for Him. There should be burning within us a fire of love and longing proportionate to the magnitude of the graces we receive here.