

**HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO**  
**SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST**  
**NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, WASHINGTON, DC**  
**JUNE 18, 2017**

My brothers and sisters in Christ, Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. It is a special feast to celebrate the Sacrament of Charity – that Mystery of God’s love for us in the Eucharist, which is rightly called “the source and summit” of all life in the Church.

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father’s personal representative to the United States, I wish to express the Holy Father’s closeness to all gathered here and to those listening on television and radio, especially the sick and the homebound. Additionally, in the United States, today is Fathers’ Day. I wish all fathers a truly blessed day and thank you for your many sacrifices. I also offer my prayers for the many priests, spiritual fathers to the flock, who tirelessly serve and feed their families with the Bread of Life.

Indeed, God is the Lord and Father of us all. God is the Father who provides for and feeds His family. God provided for our first parents in the Garden. They sinned and disobeyed. Adam was told that he would have to work by the “sweat of his brow” for the bread he was to eat. (cf. Gen 3:19)

Of course, this was not part of God’s original plan; He longed to feed his family. At the time of the Exodus, as our first reading from Deuteronomy recounts, when the people were hungry from their journey in the desert, God fed them with manna. He did this to show them *that not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*

The Book of Exodus gives further detail: every morning the people were given manna – bread from heaven; each evening, they were given quail – flesh from heaven. The manna was described as being white and tasted “like wafers made with honey,” an allusion to the Promised Land, a land overflowing with milk and honey. This also provided the people with hope in the midst of trial.

But the Father longed to feed his flock with something more than manna. At each Mass, during the Lord’s Prayer, we implore him to give us “our daily bread”, not just ordinary bread but the “super-substantial bread.” We are praying for the Lord to bless us with the new manna for the new covenant – of the new Exodus.

Of this the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2837) says:

“Taken in a qualitative sense, it signifies what is necessary for life, and more broadly every good thing necessary for subsistence. Taken literally, it (epi-ousios) refers directly to the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ, the ‘medicine of immortality’, without which we have no life within us.”

In the Gospel (John 6:51-58), we heard Jesus refer to the manna. He is *the living bread come 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.* And again, the Gospel concludes, “*This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.*”

Jesus was addressing the crowds after He had performed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. Now, they wanted more bread, but they were not interested in the Bread of God's Word – the Law – nor were they very much interested in Him as the Bread of Life. They were thinking only in terms of material things. Jesus was not sent by the Father to give worldly things as such, but to give Himself entirely for us.

In the Eucharist, Jesus gives His flesh for the Life of the world. The Eucharist is no ordinary bread, but Jesus – in His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. As the Sequence reads: *Ecce panis angelorum/factus cibus viatorum/vere panis filiorum/non mittendus canibus* [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.]

By God's grace, we are his children and are fed from the hand of the Eternal Father with the Bread of Life. Eating this Bread gives us, not the promise of mere physical sustenance and an earthly homeland, but the promise of eternal life and a heavenly homeland. St. Thomas Aquinas captured it well in his *O Sacrum Convivium*: "O sacred banquet, in which Christ becomes our food, the memory of his passion is recalled; the soul is filled with grace; and, the pledge of future glory is given to us."

For we who have been baptized into the life of the Most Holy Trinity, the Eucharist is the nourishment that sustains us as we cross the desert of this world, which is thirsting for justice and relief from ideological and economic systems that do not promote life or nourish either the body and soul and which is hungering for peace amid violence and terror.

Yes, in the trials of this world, Jesus provides us with sweet relief in the Blessed Sacrament. He comes to meet us. He who was born in the flesh of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, the "house of Bread", who suffered in the Flesh upon the Cross for us, and who rose from the dead in the flesh, is the same One who was and is blessed, broken, and given to us – for the life of the world! This is how God continues to feed his family. No longer do we have to work by the sweat of our brow until death! This is God's gift to us!

To receive this gift– to receive Communion – is to enter into the very life of Jesus *and* to accept the responsibility of living consistently with the gift. Pope Francis says, "Our communion with the Lord obliges us, his disciples, to imitate him, making our existence, through our behavior, bread broken for others, as the Teacher has broken the bread that is truly his flesh. This means for us generous conduct toward our neighbor thereby demonstrating the attitude of giving life for others." (Angelus Address, 22 June 2014)

Transformed by the Body and Blood of the Lord, each one of us, in communion with Jesus and in conformity with the Mystery received, is called to be bread, broken for the life of the world. If by faith, we recognize His Real Presence in the Sacred Host, then by faith, we must, in practicing this same faith, seek his face in the poorest of the poor – in the stranger, the sick, the prisoner. In this way, we overcome the materialism and individualism of the culture with a culture of solidarity and life, flowing from the Eucharist, so that no one feels alone. Rather each person, through love, can recognize that God is the Lord and Father of us all, who never ceases, through His Beloved Son, to feed his family.