

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ | For Sunday, June 19, 2022

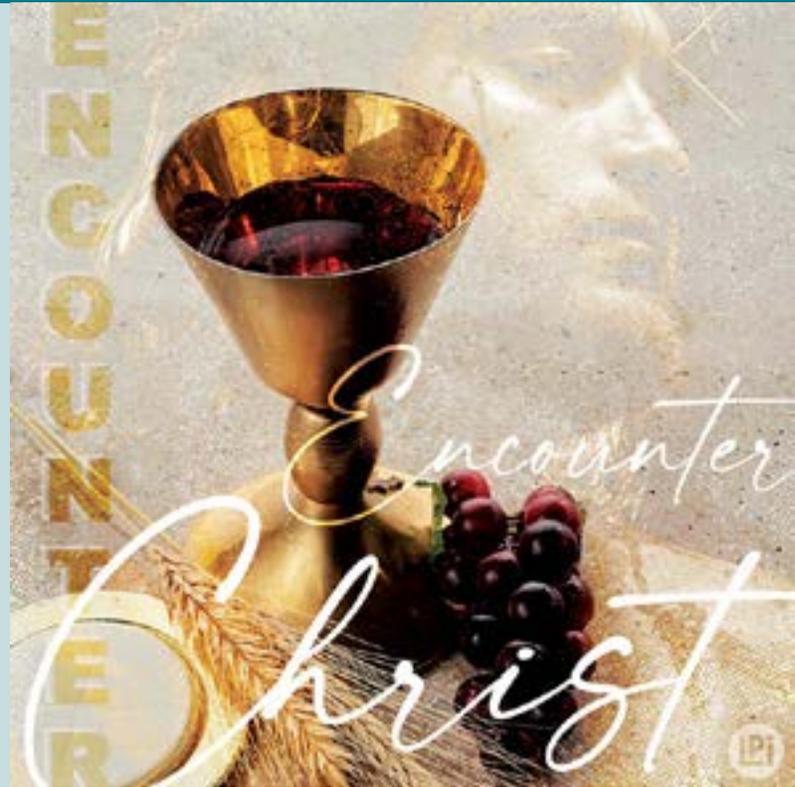
The Sacrament of Abiding Presence

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Genesis 14:18-20

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Luke 9:11b-17



Imagine this: you've been waiting a long time to attend a conference with a speaker whom you admire. You've paid the registration, made your travel plans, settled into your hotel, and now you've taken your seat among many others, ready to listen, learn, and be inspired. You are ready to take notes, and you even snap a quick selfie so you can post your attendance to your social accounts, hoping to get some likes and comments. After some dazzling videos and introductions, the presentation begins with some jaw-dropping demonstrations — miracles — for which there are no real explanations, just amazement. Then, a break. You take 15 minutes to walk around and get a fresh cup of coffee, add two French Vanilla creamers and stir, just the way you like it. And you re-take your seat, coffee in hand, eagerly anticipating the next session. A meal is served — a simple one at that. Then, the conference day is over. And you head home.

If you are like me, you'd be thinking that this conference was a waste of time! The time and money invested wasn't worth the show and the food. There wasn't even a swag bag to take home or a merch table there to buy resources! I suspect that many of us have a similar mindset when we approach the Eucharist.

The late-Archbishop Harry Flynn would begin the celebration of Mass by inviting us to become aware of "our need" for God's forgiveness and mercy. My *need*. What needs do I bring with me to Mass? Certainly, there are family concerns, country and global concerns, community concerns,

job concerns, health concerns, financial concerns, etc. As I've gotten older, I don't think that these were the needs he was talking about. The needs I have deal more with my 'soul-sickness' than anything else. These (aka, sin) involve those private, interior battles of doubt, lust, insecurity, abandonment, anger, worry, boredom, bitterness, powerlessness, gluttony, greed, judgement, and condemnation, apathy ... all sorts of symptoms that keep us *incurvatus in se* — curved inwards towards ourselves — as St. Augustine would say. Rather than go to Jesus with our needs, we think that we have to fix ourselves with all the modern self-help approaches available to us ... or sometimes, we deny there's a need altogether through fear or ignorance! But these human remedies lack the genuine power to heal a soul-sickness, which only Jesus' presence can. Only a brief review of the Gospels reminds us what happens every time Jesus appears on the scene: people are healed, sicknesses are cured, and evidence of Jesus' Kingdom is believed.

So, our needs — whatever they may be, no matter how grievous or many there are — become the offering that we bring each time we come to Mass. The verbs in the Gospel text then show us what Jesus does with our meager offerings (symbolized by the loaves). Jesus "takes" the loaves — the curse of sin away from us through his cross, he "blesses" them — with divine adoption into the family of God through faith and baptism, he "breaks" them — through instruction and experience and prayer that our ways aren't his ways, and then "gives" them to the disciples for distribution — so we can share with others how our lives have been changed by Jesus.

The Eucharist — his body, blood, soul, and divinity — then, is the sacrament of Jesus' abiding presence (μένῃ, menō) within us. He is with us in our need. We are aware of this mystery only in faith, with the spiritual eyes of a pure heart. We are not left abandoned or orphaned to figure out this messy life according to our own whims and fascinations. He gently tethers himself to us in the Eucharist, so our sorrows are his, our tribulations and trials are his, our joys are his. Our life becomes his life because his life courses within our souls. So, the Eucharist is not an event we attend or a commodity we consume, but the mystery of a Person we encounter that brings peace into the senseless and broken world in which we find ourselves today.

Br. John-Marmion Villa

PRAYER

God, give us the grace to embrace
The mysteries we don't understand,
The cruciform openness to live a tender surrender,
Into your ways wiser and kinder than ours,
And the deep shalom-peace of simply being
With you here,
Right here,
With us.