

## Body & Blood of Christ 2007

Before there was the notion of re-gifting, there was and ever will be the ultimate re-gift: the hand-me-down. Undeniable, unrepentant tried and true, especially tried. But if we tended to disdain the paper-thin shirts, worn-out shoes, and unfashionable suits, there were, and are, some things that we are thankful were handed down: family recipes, precious musical instruments, priceless books that are no longer and never will be in print again. Handing things on may sometimes be born of necessity; more often than not, it is a token, a gesture of love: this thing I have, which means so much to me, I want it to mean so much to you. And if it does mean anything to us, this thing we received, we show it care: protect it from damage or destruction, and make sure that we never lose it, and who knows, but maybe pass it on to another to enjoy it as did we.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul wrote “brothers and sisters, I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.” He was speaking here of the Eucharistic celebration, but in fact everything which we receive from God is truly that: received, handed on to us. The gifts of God do not spring up in a vacuum; he hands them on to us, through the hands of other people. Take, for example, the very gift of faith: it’s been handed on from generation to generation now since the time of the apostles. I didn’t wake up one morning, and with no knowledge of Jesus start worshiping him: my parents had me baptized, my mom taught me how to pray, one of my best friends witnessed the Catholic faith to me by practicing his faith with real enthusiasm, rather than grudgingly and with resentment; and Father John Cooper gave me instructions in Catholicism in the basement of this very church. And the priesthood was handed down to me, through the numerous priests who drew me to this vocation by living their vocation in such a way as made it appealing and desirable to onlookers, and especially through the power of bishop, who handed on the priesthood to me at my ordination. Everything that I have now was handed to me by someone else; we all receive faith, and then hopefully pass it on to others the same way we received it. So, we received this faith; that’s why we’re here; but do we love it? How do we treat this gift which has been dropped into our laps, so to speak? We may nurture it with constancy in practice, with study, with going above and beyond the bare minimum requirements, by reading about it, by volunteering our time for it. But, it’s also easy to neglect it: hit Mass when we feel inclined to attend, give no time to prayer, no time to adoration; the Bible collects dust on the shelf, the rosary is relegated to being an accessory hanging from the car mirror. How we treat this gift will tell God how much we love it; and neglect will only increase a man’s dampened fervor, and dampened fervor increase a person’s neglect, creating a dangerous downward spiral which can lead to the death of the gift.

Paul also wrote: *In the same way also the cup, after supper saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood."* As Jesus once handed the cup to his disciples, so has the cup of his blood been handed down to generation after generation of Christians. But he also referred to the chalice as the cup of his suffering, and said to his disciples "of this cup you shall also drink." Handed along with the gift of faith is the gift, and it is a gift, of the cross. We have, or will, receive some cross to carry in the course of the years. But life itself carries the inevitability of suffering, and many suffer without picking up their crosses and carrying them. So if the suffering is inevitable, then what's the choice? And where can there be any merit, if we carry our crosses, not because we accept them, but because there's no way not to accept them? The difference lies in our attitude, in essence, in how we treat our crosses. Look at how Jesus approached his cross: he did not rail against the injustice of it, he did not lash out in anger and blame; he didn't disdain it, because he knew that those pieces of wood would be instrumental in accomplishing his mission, which was our redemption. Now, it's important to keep in mind that we have not received from God torments and pain; those are the result of sin, and while he allows them, he does not hand them on. What we receive, and what we in turn may hand on to others, is the cross. The torments and pains will happen; the question is, will we still love God even when he does not prevent them? Will we love him, when he allows our crosses to purify us, to steer us towards the redemption he gained for us? How do we treat the crosses in our lives? Are we angry, do we rail against them, do we blame others for them? The Church has never said to go out and seek suffering, and has never said not to abate suffering when we are given the opportunity for cures and for healing. But will we be like Jesus was at that third fall: so tired, so weak, in so much agony, and yet be so driven by love that we will not only get up, but get up and love those who have caused us our pain, and love those who do nothing to help, and love the God who does not intervene right now, because he knows that we, too, must arrive at our Calvary in imitation of our Savior, if we will ever arrive at our glory? To imitate Christ as he made his way of the cross, is to treat our crosses well.

But in the handing on of gifts, nothing compares with the ultimate gift, and the one we celebrate this weekend on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. "I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus took bread, broke it and said "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." The Mass has been handed down in roughly the same form since the time of the apostles. It's a bit different from the handing on of faith and the giving of a cross to bear,, because the power to consecrate the Eucharist has been handed on through the ministerial priesthood; the priesthood of all believers do not hand it down from one generation to the next. But if all believers do not receive and hand down the *power*, all do receive the *graces*, and all are called to bring others to this great table of grace. And so we arrive at the great "Corpus

Christi” question: how do we treat our Lord’s Body and Blood; how do we treat the Eucharistic? If we have a poor, suffering, emaciated animal, we don’t clutch it to our bosom and tell it how much we love it, when there’s food a few steps away to feed it; spare the words, let actions show the love. The Church tells us how we should treat our Lord in the Eucharist: we should prepare for this encounter with proper fasting and prayer and focusing our minds, if necessary confession. And we should approach our Lord with all due reverence and sincere love. If the priest were handing out coins worth a million dollars, my oh my, with what care we would receive that; well, what happens at that altar rail reduces a million dollar coin to less than the value of a penny. You know, the high point of our week should be that moment of communion; but the second highest point of the week, should be the moment that the priest holds the Host before us, and says “the Body of Christ,” and we say “Amen.” A fleeting moment when God, whom the universe cannot contain, is held before us and offered to us, in a moment of supreme grace, and in concord with the faith he handed down to us, and in union with any cross he has asked us to carry. How do we treat him? Like a piece of bread, or like a Savior? Hands clean? Souls clean? Do we approach carefully, thoughtfully? The feast of Corpus Christi reminds us that how we treat the Sacred Host, is now how we treat our Lord and Savior.

Love is an act of the will; and in our wills we may concede our belief in the True Presence, but do our actions demonstrate our professed love for what God is handing on to us? Our wills are a higher level of operation than our feelings, but we should feel something about this gift; Jesus—in the Blessed Sacrament—should command real attention, real effort in our preparation to receive him, and real sacrifices in our lives if this is real love on our part. How do we feel about our Eucharistic Lord? The answer will be given by the way we treat him in the Eucharistic. It’s easy to say we love him; the challenge will be to show that we love him. Abram responded to Melchizedek by giving him a tenth of everything; how little God asks in return from us for his gifts. If our faith does mean anything to us, we show it care: protect it from damage or destruction, and make sure that we never lose it. If we see the glory to be gained through the cross, we bear our sufferings with love. And if we love our Eucharistic Lord, we will give him preparation before receiving him, thoughtfulness while we are engulfed in the Mystery, and genuine reverence at all times, in the Holy Eucharist.

Copyright © 2007