

Year B Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
June 14, 2009
Ex 24:3-8; Ps 116; Heb 9:11-15; Mk 14:12-16, 22-26

“There is no forgiveness without blood-shedding,” says Heb 9:22. This is like saying that anything of great value, like our lives, can only be worth—and redeemed by—something of the utmost value. Thus 1 Pet 1:18-19 reminds us of at what price we were rescued, the precious blood of the spotless Lamb of God.

Christ’s sacrifice was of himself. The Old Testament offerings were of bulls and goats, figures of a future true sacrifice which would really take away sin and cleanse our conscience once and for all. See Heb 9:1-10:10. Christ obeyed God his Father to the point of death on the cross, Phil 2:8, not without a personal struggle, Lk 22:39-44; Heb 5:7-10. Jesus had come into the world for this purpose, to die on the cross, Jn 12:27-33. In this way Jesus would draw all to himself, to conversion, to the living God, Acts 2:36-39. The Christian preaching through which God could grant the life-giving and miracle-working Spirit was the presentation of Christ crucified, 1 Cor 2:1-5; Gal 3:1-5.

Already from his birth Jesus’ sacrifice would be seen as food, since he was placed in a manger, there being no room in the “upper quarters” (better than “inn,” in Greek *katáluma*, Lk 2:7). At the end of his life, he will again refer to these “upper quarters” in order to celebrate the Last Supper, Mk 14:14. The broken bread *is* his body, and the cup *is* his poured blood. Blood was identified with life, Gn 9:4, and was only to be used for purposes of expiation of sins, Lv 17:10-12, for “atonement of the soul.” Bread was also a sign of God’s salvation, having fed the Israelites in the wilderness, Ex 16:3-4. Jesus declared himself to be God’s true “bread from heaven” given for the life of the world, Jn 6:32-33, 51.

So this solemn feast celebrates Jesus’ giving of himself for our salvation, re-presented (made present again) under the species of bread and wine. These are his flesh and blood (in Aramaic Jesus would have spoken of his “flesh,” not “body,” as in Jn 6:51-56). This is the sacrament of the new covenant, of the circumcised, obedient heart (Jer 31:31-34; Dt 30:6-14; Col 2:9-15). This sacrament gives eternal life and is a pledge of resurrection; we remain in Jesus through it, Jn 6:56; 15:1-6.