

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 29, 2005
(The Body and Blood of Christ)
(Deut 8:2-3, 14b-16a; Ps 147; 1 Cor 10:16-17; John 6:51-58)

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Divine nourishment of God's people is a theme that runs through the Old Testament. We know that God provided water, manna and quail for his people in the Exodus desert (Exod 16-17 etc.). Later, Prov 9:5 would use the images of bread and wine for wisdom, God's spiritual nourishment of his people, symbolized by the staple foods of the day. God created us and gives us life, maintains us as a fatherly provider (see Matt 7:11; cf. Luke 11:13). God created us, and provides all that we physically need, but real life is to share his blessedness through knowledge of him (see John 17:3).

In the first reading, Moses describes the time in the desert. As Israel had put God to the test in Meriba and Massa (Exod 17:1-7; Ps 95:8), this reading tells us that God put Israel to the test, too, in the desert, for forty years, to see what was in Israel's heart, and whether Israel would keep his commandments. This was God's way of showing his people that one does not live by physical bread alone, but by God's words, his wisdom, his guidance unto eternal life of which earth should be a foretaste (see John 6:27). Jesus would quote this passage from Deut when he, recapitulating, fulfilling and perfecting Israel's history, was put to the test (the meaning of being "tempted") for forty days and nights and was hungry, but did not put God to the test or complain or murmur, but quoted Scripture to the Satan ("tempter"), showing that he, Jesus, lived by the words that came from God's mouth.

John's gospel goes to the heart of the mystery of Christ and reveals him to be God's very Word, God's Wisdom and saving communication of himself to the world. God's self not just speaking now, as creative and powerful as that is (see Wis 9:1-2), but becoming flesh (John 1:14), one of us, to fully reveal who God is and what God calls us to (sharing his divine life). The manna, "bread from heaven," was just a symbol which foreshadowed this. Jesus is God's real nourishment unto eternal life, Jesus who gives his flesh and blood, his humanity now glorified, for our share in divine life.