

Year A Corpus Christi

Dt 8:2-16; Ps 147; 1 Cor 10:16-17; Jn 6:51-58

ROME. This is the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. God sent his Son, who was born of Mary the Virgin from Nazareth by the Holy Spirit, and who through this Spirit offered himself up for us on the Cross. He left us his Body and Blood so that he could stay with us and give us life, that we might be *in Him*, as St. Paul so often says, and be one body with him as our Head.

Jesus the Word of God was our food from the beginning. This is alluded to already in Lk 2:7, where Jesus was placed in a manger, a place where animals ate, there being no place for him in the “upper quarters,” mentioned again with the same Greek word (*katáluma*) at the Last Supper (Lk 22:11). God feeds us with his Word, God teaches and “educates” us through it. This is what the first reading says: God led Israel through the desert forty years, humbling and testing Israel, to see what was in Israel’s heart. Here manna is not a delightful food from heaven, but a humbling form of nourishment, and its purpose was to teach Israel that one does not live by bread alone, but by what comes out of the mouth of God, his Word. God “educated” Israel; better, corrected and disciplined Israel like a father does with his child. This discipline took the form of “corporal punishment” in the “Old Testament (see the “spare the rod spoil the child” text, Prv 13:24), and Jesus the Servant was not spared it (Is 53:5), even literally scourged (with use of the Greek form of the word translated “discipline,” Lk 23:16, 22). See, regarding the rest of us as God’s children, Hb 12:5-13. So Jesus was put into the ground like a grain of wheat, and we as his Body must be ground, too, to be fine wheat, as St. Ignatius of Antioch said.

My little pilgrimage ended in the convent of the Sisters of Charity and of Christian Instruction of Nevers, where Bernadette Soubirous spent her last years and where she now lies incorrupt. Bernadette of course is inseparable from Our Lady of Lourdes, whom she called *ma bonne Mère*. Our psalm this Sunday includes quite a lot: praise for God who ends our exiles and heals, who supports the humble, whose omnipotence is manifested in nature, who feeds his children with the finest wheat in the fortified city of Jerusalem. “He has not done thus with any (other) nation.” This verse is applied to Our Lady of Guadalupe, so it refers to Mary the Mother from whom Jesus took the flesh that he gave as bread for the life of the world, Jn 6:51.