

## FIRST READING – C THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

A reading from the book of Genesis.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

In those days:

After Abram's return

King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine;  
he was priest of God Most High.

He blessed Abram and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,

maker of heaven and earth;

and blessed be God Most High,

who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him one tenth of everything.

Pause for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – C THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,  
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed  
took a loaf of bread,

and when he had given thanks,  
he broke it and said,

“This is my Body that is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my Blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,  
you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Pause for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – C THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God,  
and healed those who needed to be cured.  
The day was drawing to a close,  
and the twelve came to him and said,  
“Send the crowd away,  
so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside,  
to lodge and get provisions;  
for we are here in a deserted place.”  
But he said to them,  
“You give them something to eat.”  
They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish —  
unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.”  
For there were about five thousand men.  
And Jesus said to his disciples,  
“Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.”  
They did so and made them all sit down.  
And taking the five loaves and the two fish,  
he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them,  
and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.  
And all ate and were filled.  
What was left over was gathered up,  
twelve baskets of broken pieces.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### Reading I: Genesis 14:18-20

It is striking that the letter to the Hebrews, which elaborates on Melchizedek as a type of Christ's high priesthood, never mentions the gifts—the bread and wine—that he presented to Abraham.

This is all the more surprising since these gifts were allegorically interpreted by Philo, by the rabbis, and by the Church Fathers from Cyprian onwards as a type of the Eucharist, especially in its sacrificial character.

Maybe we can remain true to the New Testament and still give the text about Melchizedek a fitting interpretation for Corpus Christi.

Westcott suggests that Melchizedek is presented in Hebrews as a priest not in sacrificing but in blessing, "that is, in communicating the fruits of an efficacious sacrifice already made."

This we can accept, as long as we also affirm that the sacrifice made once for all becomes a present reality in the Eucharist through the consecration and sharing of the bread and wine, and, because of the presence of the sacrifice, communicates its fruits.

### Responsorial Psalm: 110:1, 2, 3, 4

This is one of the royal psalms. Its date and original reference are in dispute.

There is a trend to interpret it as a reference to the early kings of Judah in the Davidic line, though earlier critics regarded it as an attempt of the priestly family of the Hasmoneans to justify their claim to kingship as well as to priesthood.

In either case, Melchizedek is taken as the prototype of the priest-king.

The author of Hebrews takes up this psalm because it enables him to develop his own teaching on Christ's high priesthood.

In the earlier Church, the messiahship (kingship) of Jesus was firmly established. Now Hebrews develops the further Christology (implicit in the early Church's sacrificial interpretation of Jesus' death) that he is also priest.

The psalm may remind us that in the Eucharist Christ is himself the true priest who presides over his Eucharistic banquet and gives himself as the sacrificial victim to the faithful. He "gives himself with his own hand" (St. Thomas Aquinas).

The ministerial priest who presides at the earthly altar is the instrument by which Christ's true high priesthood is externalized.

## Reading II: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

This passage was the second reading for the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday (q.v.) [see below for commentary\*], suggesting that the feast of Corpus Christi is an extrapolation of the earlier occasion.

On Holy Thursday we contemplate the institution of the Eucharist in its relation to the whole series of events of the sacred triduum.

On Corpus Christi the Eucharist is isolated for contemplation as an ongoing rite in the Church.

This is one of the earliest fragments of Christian tradition preserved in the New Testament (see also 1 Corinthians 15:3-7). Paul says that he "received" it before he "delivered" it to the Corinthians about A.D. 50, and the words for "receive" and "deliver" represent words for the handing on of tradition as in rabbinic practice.

So we are dealing here, not with a vision "received from the Lord," but with a tradition handed down through human witnesses, though always under the supervision of the exalted Christ.

This is not a complete description of the Last Supper but a liturgically stylized account, selecting and interpreting those features of the meal that were of importance for the Christian Eucharist.

Its mention of the supper between the bread and the cup indicates its primitive character. Only Paul and the long text of Luke mention the command to repeat it in memory of Christ, but the other accounts presume this by their very existence, for they were recorded precisely because the Church was "doing this" as a memorial of the Lord.

Paul also preserves what is more prominent in the synoptic accounts—the anticipation of the second coming. In Paul, as in the Synoptists, the Eucharist looks both backward and forward—backward to the redemptive event of the cross here made present, and forward to the second coming here anticipated.

## Gospel: Luke 9:11b-17

Many motifs have shaped the narratives of the feeding of the multitude. On the historical level there can be little doubt that the meeting of Jesus and his followers in the desert marked the critical turning point in the Galilean ministry.

(See John's note that Jesus' followers wanted to make him king, that is, a political Messiah, and Mark's enigmatic note (6:45) that Jesus sent his disciples away while he dismissed the crowd. In the light of John's account, it is clear that Jesus did this to prevent the disciples from becoming infected with the crowd's dangerous political messianism.)

There is no reason why this critical meeting should not have been accompanied by a meal, which, like all Jesus' meals with his disciples, would have eschatological associations as a foretaste of the eschatological banquet.

In earliest Christianity Jesus was interpreted as the prophet of the endtime, repeating Moses' gift of the manna (a theme that comes out most strongly in the Johannine discourse following this episode) and the miraculous multiplication of loaves by Elisha (2 Kings 4:42-44).

Further, the language of the Eucharistic liturgy has colored the narrative: "sit down . . . taking . . . loaves . . . blessed . . . broke . . . gave . . . ate."

We generally think of the Last Supper as the institution of the Eucharist. But the New Testament sees two further bases for the rite: the meals of the earthly Jesus with his followers and the appearance meals after the resurrection. These meals emphasize an aspect that was certainly present in the Last Supper (Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16-18), namely, its eschatological character.

The Eucharist is not only a feeding upon a past sacrifice made a present reality, but also a foretaste of the messianic banquet.

The (optional) sequence of Corpus Christi shows that this eschatological significance of the Eucharist was not forgotten in the Middle Ages:

Grant us with your saints, though lowest,  
Where the heav'nly feast you show  
Fellow heirs and guests to be.

Reginald H. Fuller