

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Year C

19 June 2022



Collect

O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament
have left us a memorial of your Passion,
grant us, we pray,
so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood
that we may always experience in ourselves
the fruits of your redemption.
Who live and reign with God the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

It's some fifty years since the English edition of a tiny booklet on living the eucharist was published. Originally written in Dutch for a men's community dedicated to the eucharist – hence its title *Rule for a New Brother* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) – its meditative and inspirational content found a broader audience. Here are two excerpts.

"Be ready to break the bread of your life for the poor and hungry everywhere in the world. Keep nothing for yourself but share with the others all you have received from God's tenderness."

"The Eucharist sets you on the way of Christ. It takes you into his redeeming death and gives you a share in the most radical deliverance possible. And already the light of the resurrection, the new creation, is streaming through it from beyond. Whenever you sit at table with the risen Lord, it is the first day of the week, very early in the morning."

A reading from the book of Genesis 14:18–20

Melchizedek king of Salem brought bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High. He pronounced this blessing:

'Blessed be Abraham by God Most High,
creator of heaven and earth,
and blessed be God Most High
for handing over your enemies to you.'

And Abraham gave him a tithe of everything.

First Reading

The references to bread, wine and blessing in this short reading from Genesis forge an immediate link with the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. They remind us of the supper at which Jesus himself took bread and wine and pronounced a blessing. In accordance with his bidding, the Church continues to do the same at every celebration of the eucharist. Thus, for over a thousand years, Mass-goers heard mention of Melchizedek and his bread and wine in the sole eucharistic prayer of that long era, the Roman Canon.

This much is familiar. The rest of this small story is shrouded in obscurity. Who exactly was Melchizedek? How did he come to be "a priest of God Most High"? Why did he bless Abraham? Why did Abraham give him a tenth of all he possessed? None of these questions have clear answers. What we do know is that the mysterious figure of Melchizedek captured the imagination of the author of Psalm 109/110, as we will see shortly. Next to be inspired was the author of the letter to the Hebrews (7:1-28), and then the compiler of the Roman Canon. Melchizedek has certainly enjoyed more than a fleeting moment of fame.

In spite of being so enigmatic, the reading should be simple enough to proclaim, once the pronunciation of Melchizedek's name has been checked. Readers should make sure they have the assembly's attention before they launch into this short but consequential text.

Responsorial Psalm

R. You are a priest for ever,
in the line of Melchizedek.

The Lord's revelation to my Master:
'Sit on my right:

I will put your foes beneath your feet.' R.

The Lord will send from Zion
your sceptre of power:
rule in the midst of all your foes. R.

A prince from the day of your birth
on the holy mountains;
from the womb before the daybreak I begot you. R.

The Lord has sworn an oath he will not change.
'You are a priest for ever,
a priest like Melchizedek of old.' R.

Ps 109:1–4

Responsorial Psalm

No psalm is referred to more often by New Testament writers than Psalm 109/110. They saw it making prophetic reference to the exaltation of the risen Christ and his enthronement at the right hand of God. It was even pressed into service by Jesus himself in his sparring with the scribes, much to the crowd's delight (Mk 12:35-37).

The original psalm is in the form of an oracle conveying divine promises to the king. He is assured of triumph over his foes, being adopted as a son of God, and having priesthood conferred on him. The response, with its mention of Melchizedek, is taken from the body of the psalm. It forges an explicit link with the first reading.

In spite of its use in the New Testament, this is the only time in the three-year cycle that Psalm 109/110 is prayed. Readers will need to take care with both the unfamiliar response and the psalm verses. The response is in two parts and contains Melchizedek's name, so it will need to be articulated clearly. The verses are in three-line format rather than the more common four, and the lines are very short. The poetic structure should be respected and not reduced to prose.

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul
to the Corinthians**

11:23–26

This is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you: that on the same night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it, and he said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me.’ In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.’ Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Luke**

9:11–17

Jesus made the crowds welcome and talked to them about the kingdom of God; and he cured those who were in need of healing.

It was late afternoon when the Twelve came to him and said, ‘Send the people away, and they can go to the villages and farms round about to find lodging and food; for we are in a lonely place here.’ He replied, ‘Give them something to eat yourselves.’ But they said, ‘We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we are to go ourselves and buy food for all these people.’ For there were about five thousand men. But he said to his disciples, ‘Get them to sit down in parties of about fifty.’ They did so and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven, and said the blessing over them; then he broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute among the crowd. They all ate as much as they wanted, and when the scraps remaining were collected they filled twelve baskets.

Second Reading

As was the case at the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, the gospel for today’s feast does not recount the institution of the eucharist. That role is played by this reading from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, the only report of the eucharistic meal outside the three synoptic gospels. Paul’s thumbnail sketch has more in common with Luke’s account than that of Matthew and Mark.

In all four cases, the supper is placed in the context of crisis. In the gospels, of course, it’s Jesus’ impending betrayal and execution. In 1 Corinthians, it’s the crisis of destructive division in the community. Paul’s great conviction was that in Christ all distinctions – between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female – were abolished. He is appalled to learn that when the Corinthians gather for a meal some of the community are choosing to dine separately from the rest. This is a betrayal of the good news.

It prompts him to repeat “what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you.” Paul immediately establishes the full authority of his teaching. What is more, he goes on, the truth is that the eucharist is a memorial of nothing less than the death of the Lord. We still testify to this truth in one of the memorial acclamations after the institution narrative of the eucharistic prayer.

The text will be familiar enough to readers and as such poses no difficulty. What matters is that it is proclaimed with the deliberation that Paul’s teaching and today’s festival call for.

Gospel

Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke provides no account of John the Baptist’s death, but in the verse preceding today’s gospel reading he has Herod say, “John? I beheaded him. So who is this I hear such reports about?” Herod had wondered whether Jesus was Elijah or one of the prophets. In a sense his intuition was sound, as the gospel story shows.

Just as Elijah blessed the widow and her son with an endless supply of flour and oil (1 Kings 17:8-16), and his disciple Elisha fed the people with twenty barley loaves and had some left over (2 Kings 4:42-44), so Jesus feeds the crowd with more than enough. More generally the gospel story evokes the saga of the exodus and the rich theme of shepherding in both Old and New Testaments. In Luke’s infancy narrative he emphasises Jesus’ Davidic ancestry; here he implies that Jesus is the true shepherd-king of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus’ gestures with the fish and the bread – taking, blessing, breaking, sharing – were typical of Jewish meals but had and still have special resonance for Christian communities breaking bread in his memory. His command at the last supper to “do this in memory of me” had its predecessor in the demand he made of the Twelve, “Give them something to eat yourselves.” The two directives go hand in hand. The eucharist is ever a missionary meal.

Solemn Blessing

May almighty God bless us in his kindness
and pour out saving wisdom upon us.

Amen.

May he nourish us always with the teachings of the faith
and make us persevere in holy deeds.

Amen.

May he turn our steps towards himself
and show us the path of charity and peace.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time III, Roman Missal p 715.)