

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ  
"Medicine for the Times We Live In"  
Fr. Frank Schuster

The first reading from Deuteronomy has haunted me this week. Moses teaches his people, "Remember how for forty years now the Lord, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments." These words have haunted me this past week because it feels like our world has been led into a desert of sorts; a place of affliction, a place that feels barren, a place where we are being tested. Moses shares with them that it was only when they were afflicted with hunger that God was finally able to feed them with bread that was unknown to them, so to teach them that it is not by bread alone that we live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. And what strikes me about that verse is, this is the very sentence Jesus used to beat back Satan during his temptation in the desert. Recall that Satan tempts Jesus to turn a stone into bread during his time of fasting. Jesus responded with this very scripture passage, we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

I mention this because, as a people, it feels like we have been led into a desert, a place of affliction and a place where we are being tested. And there are temptations all around us with regard to how we cope during this pandemic and how we react to the violence we are seeing in our communities. I am amazed at how easy it has been for people to succumb to the culture of hate, bigotry and stereotyping that is bubbling in our country that paints everyone around us with the same brush: all black people are this way, all white people are that way, all protestors are this way, all police officers are that way, all republicans are this way, all democrats are that way. That instinct in our culture to stereotype the people around us is very dehumanizing and wrong. It is a wicked kind of bread our culture is tempting us to consume right now and it carries the real risk of consuming us along the way if we let it.

Jesus offers us a different kind of bread. Jesus tells the crowds in our Gospel from St. John: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." The crowd mimics the Hebrews in the desert by quarreling in one voice. They say, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" The way the narrative reads, it is as if we are right back in the desert with Moses and the Hebrews. Jesus says to them, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him... This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

This is why, my friends, the source and summit of our Catholic worship is the Eucharist, the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. As we continue our journey through the desert of this pandemic and the wasteland of intolerance in our country today, Jesus has given us food for the journey. He has given us manna from heaven in the Eucharist. The Body and Blood of our Lord is the medicine we desperately need for the times we live in. Through adversity, through affliction, and through no shortage of temptation, the Eucharist is forming us on what it really means to become Christ-like to the world around us.

On the feast of Corpus Christi we recognize that we simply can't survive on earthly bread but only by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. In John's Gospel, that divine Word is a Person. That divine Word is Jesus. And Jesus offers us his flesh as true food and his blood as true drink. We who eat this bread from heaven are transformed into one Body of Christ, the Church. This is why the word "communion" comes from the same word as "community". As Church, as a community configured to Christ, we approach the afflictions, the barrenness and the temptations of the times we live in as a people of hope. We walk through these times as a people of hope. This is because we know that our story does not end in a desert, but with the Promised Land. And, the worst thing we can do right now is succumb to temptation, turn around and run back to Pharaoh. When we receive the Eucharist after Mass today, we are invited to name inside our hearts that one area in our life that needs to be transformed right now. What is that one thing I am dealing with in life right now that needs transformation; that needs to become more Christ-like? This is a very important thing to consider right now because when we worthily receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we are what we eat.