

FROM THE FATHERS

On the Holy Eucharist by St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74)

O precious and wonderful banquet!

Since it was the will of God's only-begotten Son that men should share in his divinity, he assumed our nature in order that by becoming man he might make men gods. Moreover, when he took our flesh, he dedicated the whole of its substance to our salvation. He offered his body to God the Father on the altar of the cross as a sacrifice for our reconciliation. He shed his blood for our ransom and purification, so that we might be redeemed from our wretched state of bondage and cleansed from all sin. But to ensure that the memory of so great a gift would abide with us for ever, he left his body as food and his blood as drink for the faithful to consume in the form of bread and wine.

O precious and wonderful banquet, that brings us salvation and contains all sweetness! Could anything be of more intrinsic value? Under the old law it was the flesh of calves and goats that was offered, but here Christ himself, the true God, is set before us as our food. What could be more wonderful than this? No other sacrament has greater healing power; through it sins are purged away, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift. It is offered in the Church for the living and the dead, so that what was instituted for the salvation of all may be for the benefit of all. Yet, in the end, no one can fully express the sweetness of this sacrament, in which spiritual delight is tasted at its very source, and in which we renew the memory of that surpassing love for us which Christ revealed in his passion.

It was to impress the vastness of this love more firmly upon the hearts of the faithful that our Lord instituted this sacrament at the Last Supper. As he was on the point of leaving the world to go to the Father, after celebrating the Passover with his disciples, he left it as a perpetual memorial of his passion. It was the fulfilment of ancient figures and the greatest of all his miracles, while for those who were to experience the sorrow of his departure, it was destined to be a unique and abiding consolation.

Prayers to remember

A prayer of preparation for receiving Holy Communion

Purify my conscience, I beseech thee, O Lord, by thy visitation; that my Lord Jesus Christ thy Son, when he cometh, may find in me a mansion prepared for himself. Who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, world without end.

25th July
2021

Eighth Sunday
after Trinity/
Seventeenth Sunday
in Ordinary Time

Give us our Daily Bread



We are given today St John's wonderful meditation on the meaning of the Holy Eucharist (St John 6:1-15). Those who have followed the Lord to the far shore of the Sea of Tiberias are weary, worn, and hungry. St Philip wants to feed them but estimates that even if they had 200 denarii (i.e. a large sum of money) they would only be capable of providing a morsel of bread each - the crowd is very large, some 5,000 souls. A boy's five barley loaves and the two fishes are woefully inadequate to meet the need of the multitude. Nevertheless, the Lord instructs the disciples to sit the enormous crowd down on the grass, and, taking the meagre foodstuffs, he provides for the crowd their daily bread. All are fed out of God's plenitude in Christ. Each day we pray, 'give us this day our daily bread', a prayer that each day is answered in the gift to us of the Holy Sacrament. Christ is our bread (a theme St John goes on to explore deeply in this same chapter.) The Mass is to be our daily food; as we are to come to it each day so we receive the spiritual food we need for a living discipleship. The Mass is our sustenance. It is, in fact, the daily sacrament of the Church; other sacraments confer a special and necessary grace just once - baptism, confirmation, holy matrimony, Holy Order. Penance we return to time and again, but only the Mass is our daily bread. It is our recourse each day, for in it we receive all we need, and all we need is Christ.