

Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ 2017

What is this stuff? Que es esto? Que ce que c'est? Was ist das? I'm sure that every language has some way of posing the question, What is this? We hear it in Hebrew in today's readings. When the Israelites see this white, sticky "stuff" on the ground, they say MANNA which is the question "What is this (stuff). It's very appropriate that the Israelite experience of MANNA has always been associated with Christian Eucharist. Even when we think we know what the Eucharist is, the body and blood of Christ, we have to stand before the awesome mystery and say "Manna"? What is this? If we think we understand what the Eucharist is, than we are surely lacking in understanding. Yes, we believe heart and soul that this substance of bread and wine is transformed into Christ's being "for us". At the same time the mystery is so incomprehensible that all we can do is stand or kneel in awe and wonder at such great love contained in bread and wine.

A few years ago I baptized two young boys at the Easter Vigil. They also received complete initiation as they were confirmed and received Eucharist for the first time. At a meal at their home a few weeks after we were talking about the experience and I use the word "Eucharist", which I explained again means "Thanksgiving". Tyler, the younger boy said that he thought it was UniChrist, meaning that we were all One in Christ through our communion. Nate, the older boy thought it was You Carry Christ. Wow! I said, what wisdom from two young boys! That conversation reminded me that we don't always hear the same thing and sometimes that makes the experience even richer.

As great a mystery as the Eucharist is, it may be even greater in that the claim we make is that through our reception of the body and blood of Christ, we receive ourselves. As St Augustine says, "Be what you see. Receive who you are". But we are also bound together as Christ's body. St Paul uses the image of the "one loaf". As you must know, in the early Church the custom was for people to bring loafs of bread, some of which was consecrated for the Eucharist and some distributed to the poor. What a powerful symbol that is! I'm sure you know the experience of sitting around a table and literally "breaking bread", as each person takes a piece from the loaf. There is such a striking image of being fed, nourished, united together in this communal action.

So What is this? Manna? Such a great and awesome mystery!