

Today we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi – the Body and Blood of Christ. The church invites us to focus our attention on the Holy Eucharist. And based on the readings, I would like to suggest one thought about it: The Holy Eucharist is the food for our journey to heaven.

The first reading today recalled the journey of Israelites of long ago when God led them from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land, or as the Bible describes it “a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Exodus 3:8). But this was a long journey through the desert and on the way they had to face many challenges.

On the one hand, there were challenges coming from outside. In the desert, they did not have enough food or drink. And they encountered serpents and scorpions, not to mention hostile tribes who attacked them. These outside challenges from their environment made their journey extremely difficult.

On the other hand, along with those outside challenges, there also came challenges from the inside. The Israelites were happy at first when God liberated them from slavery in Egypt. However, on the long journey to the promised land, they became fearful, discouraged, distrustful, and regretful. If only we were in Egypt, “when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” These inside challenges made their faith in God so empty that they began to worship idols, even a golden calf made of metal.

The image of the people of Israel journeying through the desert to the land of freedom is also our image on the journey to heaven. When you and I decided to believe in Jesus, we professed that He is the Lord who can lead us to new life and happiness. And our faith is expressed in baptism, in our confirmation, in our time of prayers, in our time at Mass. However, when we live our lives everyday, we begin to face challenges from our social environment. And this environment affects our lives very much.

To illustrate this, I will give you an example. I see that Vietnamese children born in the United States speak English very well. Even though they first learn Vietnamese with their parents or grandparents at home, gradually Vietnamese becomes their second language. English becomes their first language. Eventually, one day, they are unable to speak Vietnamese with their parents any more. Why do they no longer speak Vietnamese very well? Because they are affected by their environment. People use English at school, at church, at the shopping center, and almost everywhere.

Likewise, the world we live also affects our faith very much. Our Catholic faith teaches us to live a life of love, forgiveness, charity, righteousness, and chastity of heart. However, we live in the world that is full of hatred, revenge, selfishness, injustice, and sex. On the one hand, we profess that we trust in Jesus who leads us to a new and happy life. On the other

hand, we live in the world that does not accept the value of the Gospel that Jesus teaches us. These are challenges from outside.

And the people of Israel also faced challenges from inside, we do the same. When we became Catholic, our faith was very strong. But then we face difficulties, we are gradually distrustful and doubt God's Word. Sometimes we may be discouraged with failures. At times, we don't want to keep our faith any more. We thought that if we followed God, everything would be perfect, but the more we follow Him, the more difficulties we seem to face. Sometimes we would like to give up on our faith. At times, we would like to follow another way, not God's way. Together with the challenges from outside, the challenges from inside make our journey to heaven so difficult.

So, when we realize these difficulties and challenges in our lives, we will better acknowledge "Corpus Christi," the Body and Blood of Christ, as the living food, to help us stand firm in the midst of the storm and overcome temptations. And we will appreciate more the words of Jesus, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." Jesus says, not only in this life, but also eternal life.

And if we are grateful for the gift of the Holy Eucharist, I implore you always to attend Sunday Mass. Absolutely, we should stay home when we are sick or if we feel at risk during this pandemic. But, when it is over, please don't miss Sunday Mass. Not only is it an obligation, and I don't want to emphasize the church law that requires us to do, but for us Catholics, if we participate with our faith, the Holy Eucharist becomes the food to nourish our spiritual lives on the journey to Heaven. When we receive the Holy Eucharist, we receive the whole Christ, his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. When we receive Christ, we receive the Living Bread from heaven that gives us new life and eternal life.

My brothers and sisters, celebrating the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ today, we are encouraged to be deeply aware of the significance of the Holy Eucharist that Jesus gives us. As the mana from heaven that nourished the people of Israel on their way to the promised land, the Holy Eucharist nourishes us on the way to our Promised Land of Heaven. And may God help us to always acknowledge that the Holy Mass is the source and summit of our spiritual life.

Re. Linh Bui
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