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**HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF  
THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST**

**Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cathedral**

June 10, 2012

The feast we celebrate today gives us an opportunity to reflect upon the gift we have been given.

In the Gospel Jesus said, “This is the Blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.”

What did He mean when He said that the cup stood for a new covenant? The word "covenant" is a common word in the Jewish religion. The basis of the Jewish religion was that God had entered into a covenant with Israel. The word means something like an arrangement, a relationship. The acceptance of the old covenant is set out in the first reading from Exodus 24:3-8; and from that passage the covenant was entirely dependent on Israel keeping the law. If the law was broken, the covenant was broken and the relationship between God and the nation shattered. It was a relationship entirely dependent on law and on obedience to law. And since no man can keep the law, the people were forever forfeiting the relationship with God. But Jesus says, **“I am introducing and ratifying a new covenant, a new kind of relationship between God and man. And it is not dependent on law, it is dependent on the blood that I will shed.”** That is to say, it is **dependent solely on love**. In other words, Jesus says, **“I am doing what I am doing to show you how much the Father loves you.”** People are no longer simply under the law of God. Because of what Jesus did, **they are forever within the love of God**. This is the essence of what this sacrament says to us.

Jesus is associating his approaching death with the Sinai covenant. Instead of the blood of bulls, the Blood of Jesus renews and culminates the relationship between God and us. In the Eucharist we celebrate today and every day is no empty ritual, in spite of the fact that it can become a passive routine if we are not careful; **we share in the cup of Jesus’ self-offering**. By our sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ, this ritual signifies our sharing in the very life of Christ. We enter into this new and eternal covenant... a covenant which calls for faithfulness on our part... a covenant which calls us to sacrifice our lives for others as Jesus did.

Through our participation in the Eucharist, we are connected to and transformed by a living and breathing and nurturing relationship with Jesus himself... but only if we are open to the relationship. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” **Our attentiveness to the relationship** defines the impact the Eucharist will have in our lives.

**When I was in the seminary in Rome, one Sunday we had a Day of Prayer and Reflection. As part of that day, Mother Theresa came and gave a talk to us seminarians. When she entered the Chapel at the North American College, the first thing she asked was, “Where is the Eucharist?” meaning the Blessed Sacrament. Someone took her to it and the first thing**

**she did was prostrate herself before the Lord Jesus in the tabernacle. She was in her 80s and she was laying on this hard, cold, marble floor. She had such respect and love for the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. It transformed her life... it gave her life... she couldn't live without it.**

And maybe most of you would be uncomfortable doing something like that, **but isn't it something we should all do interiorly and spiritually?** Shouldn't Jesus mean that much to us?

**When bombing destroyed a rural church on a Philippine Island during WWII, the tabernacle above the altar was blown open. The ciborium and its content of hosts were scattered among the debris.**

**As enemy troops advanced, the people scattered except for one young Catholic girl. She remained in hiding. One day she found the ruins of the church and saw the hosts scattered on the ground. She knew that she could only receive communion once a day, so for the next weeks she returned to the wreckage each day to bend to the ground and pick up one host with her tongue. What faith and reverence for the Eucharist is displayed by this young girl.**

Jesus Himself, body, soul and divinity, is truly present in this sacrament. This is the foundational core belief about this sacrament. Obviously we can't scientifically prove it, but as we accept this on faith, we can spiritually prove it. Because those of us who accept this in faith have come to know the power that the Eucharist brings us. We have come to know the love that it brings us. We have come to know the healing and the forgiveness that the Eucharist brings us.

When we approach the sanctuary to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in this Eucharist, do we come before Him in great awe? Do we come before Him in deep gratitude? Do we come before Him with profound desire for intimacy? And healing?

How many of us are aware that this is a sacrament of healing? We are all sinful people and in need of healing of some kind. All of us. Prior to receiving the Lord Jesus in communion, we say, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." Healed of what? What a perfect time to call to mind and share with the Lord what specific healing we desire. He will give it to us.

When we come up to receive the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist... and we hear the words, "The Body of Christ," "The Blood of Christ," we are facing a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus in an intimate way. Jesus is sharing his love for us as He offers Himself.

Our "Amen" is our response to this encounter. The word "Amen" means... "So be it." We will never be changed by any encounter with another if we are not present to the other, human or otherwise.

And when we do something so frequently, there is a danger is that it can become a mere formality... or an insignificant practice. The Eucharist can become an empty ritual. But it is not because the Lord has made it that way. Often times, the sacrament is received as if nothing were happening... and we take our weary hearts "back home from the table of God into the narrow rooms of our lives where we are more at home than in God's upper room," Karl Rahner says.

Jesus is truly present among us through His Spirit. His Body and Blood will be offered to us in a few moments as a sign of the covenant that He has made with us.

All the healing that we need; all the love that we need, all the strength we need; all the grace that we need is contained in this encounter with Him today. Jesus welcomes us all, even if He does not find in our eyes radiant joy and eager longing.

As we gather today, let us renew our commitment to this covenant, not in some passive or empty way, but by the conscious giving of ourselves to Christ in this ritual encounter. Through the taking of His Body and Blood, may we co-mingle our lives with His so that they can become a sacrifice for others. It is only then will be changed by our encounter with Him today.