



HOLY EUCHARIST IS THE CELEBRATION OF LOVE AND SHARING-BISHOP AJAKAYE

Jun 08, 2021

EKITI, NIGERIA -

The Catholic Bishop of Ekiti Diocese, Most Rev. Felix Femi Ajakaye has described the Holy Eucharist as a celebration of love and sharing.

Bishop Ajakaye, in his homily on Sunday, June 6, to celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), equally noted that every Eucharistic Celebration, Mass, is healing, but decried the proliferation of 'healing ministry', describing it as unfortunate.

The Bishop stated: "It is very unfortunate that in the Catholic Church today, particularly in Nigeria, there is proliferation of 'Healing Ministry', as it is called in certain quarters. Unfortunately, with this great increase in number in such 'ministry', many unorthodox practices are being introduced into the Catholic Church's worship and Liturgy through some people's whims and caprices". In the homily titled: "The Holy Eucharist: The

Greatest Prayer in the Catholic Church, Sharing Life with Christ”, Bishop Ajakaye noted that” “When we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the Mass, we celebrate this mysterious presence of the Lord Jesus with the community. We are to open up to make ‘Communion’ possible”.

Read the full homily below:

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) Theme: The Holy Eucharist: The Greatest Prayer in the Catholic Church, Sharing Life with Christ.

My Brothers, Sisters and Friends, blessed and joyful Month of June 2021 to you. May God bless, sustain, strengthen, protect and guide you throughout this new month. Amen.

As a reminder, as I stated last Sunday, the Solemnity of the Blessed Holy Trinity, any life without reference to God is absurdity.

Therefore, be not afraid to make the sign of the cross solemnly, privately and publicly. To make the sign of the cross solemnly, privately and publicly is to identify with the Most Holy Trinity, never be afraid to start and end your prayer with the sign of the cross. We need to be sealed with the sign of the cross daily when we want to sleep and when we wake, and at intervals of our daily life.

This also includes before and after our food. Today, as stated before, is The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), and we are focusing on food and presence here.

Food is described as the 'source of nutrients: material that provides living things with the nutrients they need for energy and growth'. It is 'solid nourishment: substances, or a particular substance, providing nourishment for people or animals, especially in solid as opposed to liquid form'.

Food is a basic necessity of life. It is very essential. However, in the world, not many people can afford three regular meals daily, not to talk of quality food for healthy living. In fact, since the emergence of COVID-19, the Coronavirus pandemic ravaging the world, food has become scarce in many countries in the world.

People have been finding it very difficult to live. In our country, Nigeria, there are daily complaints of many people of serious hunger, along with the serious security challenge.

In fact, there is anger in the country and it is very glaring in people's utterances and actions. Even before COVID-19, for many people in the world it was difficult for them to have access to the needed food, while there were also people wasting food.

Thus, for the people who find it difficult to find food, they will understand better than those who are living in affluence that it is a sign of genuine love and care when God intervenes to feed His people.

For such people, unlike those in affluent society where bread and water are no problem, water and bread are a question of life and death.

In spite of the necessity of food in human life, human beings are also often hungry and thirsty for other values than sustenance of physical life. For instance, in a depersonalized (making a person or people not welcome or important) Society, people suffer from absence where there should be presence.

This could also happen in the Parish, Family, Workplace, Organisation, where the emphasis is on exclusiveness, instead of inclusiveness. That is, no sense of belonging. Generally, human beings hunger and thirst for companionship, love, concern, mercy, respect which are no problems in the great family of primitive people.

The question here is: Whose need is greater, the people in need of food or those in need of presence? Practically, one cannot choose one against the other. Both are very important. However, my Brothers, Sisters and Friends, where we suffer from absence, the Lord Jesus wants to be present to us with all the concern and love of a true friend for

a friend.

This is the person-to person relationship we pointed out in our Reflection last Sunday. In the same way, in the signs of daily plain food for Orientals, water, bread, wine, Jesus indicates what he intends by being present to us. He wants to share life with us. He wants to strengthen.

He wants to mean something to you and me. My Brothers, Sisters and Friends, when we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the Mass, we celebrate this mysterious presence of the Lord Jesus with the community.

We are to open up to make 'Communion' possible. The Holy Eucharist is the celebration of love and sharing. 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him, says the Lord.' (Communion Antiphon) The First Reading, Exodus 24:3-8, refers to the blood of the covenant. It points out how the early Christians understood Christ's death on the cross (today's Second Reading) and the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, the Eucharist (today's Gospel).

The covenant (partnership of God and human beings) is ratified by a sacrifice, in this case oxen, young bulls, which stand for human beings offered to God.

According to the ancients, blood is the seat of life. Moses splashes half of the blood on the altar, symbol of God, and he also sprinkles the blood on the people, who promise to be faithful to the covenant. 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you,' (Exodus 24:8)

My Brothers, Sisters and Friends, the New Testament sees God's people as a 'New Israel', related to God in a new covenant, new partnership.

We are to be aware that we are God's partners. God and His children. With this, our task is to establish God's reign of justice, love and peace on this planet, in ourselves, and in those for whom we are responsible.

We, Christians celebrate our partnership-relation with God whenever we partake in the memorial of Christ's sacrifice on the cross at which he shed his blood and ratified the new covenant between God and humankind.

Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for our sake. His blood has now replaced the oxen's blood as pointed out in today's First Reading. This is why the Second Reading of today's Liturgy - Hebrews 9:11-15, talks about the blood of Christ.

The sacred author sees our Lord shedding his blood on the cross as a high priest offering

God a sacrifice of atonement similar to that of the First Reading.

Christians of Jewish background were familiar with the activities of the Jewish high priest in the temple of Jerusalem, who entered the sanctuary to sprinkle blood, as Moses did, to ratify the covenant (First Reading).

Jesus on the cross is the High Priest. He sheds, however, not the blood of animals – goats and calves, but his own blood to ratify a new covenant (partnership) of God with ‘a New Israel’, God’s people, the Church.

Jesus Christ has given us himself and we need to always be aware of our beautiful relationship with God, our loving Father and Creator, made possible by our Lord, our Saviour and Redeemer, shedding his blood in atonement for our sins.

In the Gospel, Mark 14:12-16, 22-26, Jesus tells us: ‘This is my body. This is my blood’. The Lord’s Supper is a Christian Passover Sacrifice and Sacrificial Meal, Food. It is an anticipated memorial of the Lord’s sacrificial death on the cross (as referred to in the Second Reading), and we repeat it time and again, ‘in memory’.

In this light, our Lord’s blood was shed in atonement, to ratify a new covenant between God and humankind. ‘This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for

many.'

My Brothers, Sisters and Friends, whenever we partake in the memorial of Christ's death, let us make Christ's body and blood present in the signs of bread and wine a token of our self-surrender to God. Yes, Jesus Christ himself instituted the Holy Eucharist, 'Source and Summit of Ecclesial Life', before leaving the world.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324, states that: The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

When we accept the invitation to God's Banquet (the Holy Eucharist - God's companionship in heaven), we are supposed to be clean. We must prepare ourselves and make ourselves worthy. This is what is expected of us.

This is why we have the Confiteor (Examination of Conscience) at the beginning of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, Mass. My Brothers, Sisters and Friends, as we partake of the Sacrificial Meal, Holy Communion, let it be a real encounter, a growing oneness of mind with our Lord Jesus Christ. 'The truth is like a lion. You don't have to defend it. Let it

loose, it will defend itself' (St Augustine).

Organised worship and laws for participating in it make sense only if worship is motivated by Spirit and truth. We must keep remembering that God is not interested in hypocritical displays. Let us try as much as possible to make our worship of God meaningful daily in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

This is what is expected of us as God's children. Every Eucharistic Celebration, Mass, is healing. It is very unfortunate that in the Catholic Church today, particularly in Nigeria, there is proliferation of 'Healing Ministry', as it is called in certain quarters. Unfortunately, with this great increase in number in such 'ministry', many unorthodox practices are being introduced into the Catholic Church's worship and Liturgy through some people's whims and caprices.

Now, as Jesus did to the sellers and buyers in the Temple, House of God (John 2:13-25), practical steps and actions have to be taken to make sure that the orthodox ways of worship and celebration of the Liturgy (the Holy Eucharist) are followed in all our Dioceses and Archdioceses in Nigeria, rather than allowing people to follow their whims and caprices in this regard.

The Holy Eucharist, the Mass, is the apex, the summit, of the prayers in the Catholic

Church. It is the greatest prayer and it has the format of celebration as given by the whole Catholic Church. That is, universally. Languages may differ, but the Mass is one and we are to celebrate it 'in spirit and truth'.

The Mass is celebrated solemnly, devoid of noise. All should participate actively and the music must be solemn as well, with all the functionaries, including the Chief Celebrant, preparing their roles, their functions, adequately prior to the celebration.

The Catholic Church is God's own Church and we must do things in God's own ways in order to receive God's blessings and for our divine benefits, not our own ways for our own human benefits. Ours should not be like 'if you cannot beat them, you join them'. The Catholic Church is a sui generis Society, a unique Society. 'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference'. With confidence in God and Christ being our strength, wherever God leads us, we FOLLOW with joy commitment and happiness.

Most Rev. Felix Femi Ajakaye

Bishop of Ekiti

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