

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
Corpus Christi
May 29, 2016

Melchizedek is a very important and yet rather mysterious figure in the history of our salvation. He occurs in only two places in the Old Testament. First in the passage we heard today from the Book of Genesis and later in Psalm 110 where the familiar phrase occurs: *You are a priest forever according to the Order of Melchizedek.*

You see, Abraham had just come to the aid of the Five Kings from the fertile plain around the Dead Sea where his nephew Lot had settled. They had been overcome by four other Kings so when Abraham heard this he and three hundred and eighteen members of his household immediately engaged the enemy and defeated them.

On his return home he meets with the King of Sodom. Melchizedek then mysteriously appears bearing gifts of bread and wine. We're told that Melchizedek was King of Salem that's usually identified as Jerusalem.

But we're also told that he was a Priest of God the Most High.

So Melchizedek does two things; first he pronounces God's blessing on Abraham and then he blesses the Most High God and in response to this Abraham gives him a tithe of everything he possessed.

We can immediately see the strong Eucharistic overtones in this passage, the offering of bread and wine being only the most obvious. Also important is the blessing of Abraham by God

which Melchizedek pronounces and then his subsequent blessing of *and* giving thanks to God for the victory given to Abraham.

This is precisely what happens in the Eucharist; God blesses us and we in our turn praise, bless and thank him. The Eucharist is after all '*a holy exchange of gifts.*'

The fact that Melchizedek is at the same time a king and a priest also echoes Christ's priestly and kingly functions.

We see then that Melchizedek is an important foreshadowing of Christ and his appearance points to the significance of the Eucharist as the way in which the salvation won by Christ is made present to the world.

We also might think it a little strange that on this Feast of Corpus Christi the Church gives us not an account of the Last Supper for our Gospel text but focuses instead on the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

But if we look at the text closely we'll see that this miracle has very strong Eucharistic overtones. The language used is precisely the same as that used at the Last Supper: the words "took, blessed, broke, and gave" summarize the four movements within the prayers of consecration.

Besides, by not giving us the account of the Last Supper for our Gospel reading, the Church is stressing two important elements that are brought out in the Feeding of the Five

Thousand; namely feeding and healing.

The whole context of this great miracle is one of healing. As the opening lines states, *“Jesus made the crowds welcome and talked to them about the Kingdom of God; and he cured those who were in need of healing.”*

And *that* means there is a two-fold feeding that takes place in the Eucharist; first the obvious feeding of our bodies with bread and wine, but secondly there is the sustenance of our souls that only this food from heaven can provide.

We sometimes forget that the Eucharist is a healing sacrament. It restores us to union with God; it's a memorial of our salvation and a concrete reminder of the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf.

It's the perfect sign of his overflowing love for us.

The Eucharist is healing at its most effective because it works at the very deepest level of our being. The Eucharist makes present our salvation and connects us to eternal life. It doesn't look to the short term healing of our bodies but to the long term healing of our souls.

This is what the bottom line of the Eucharist is all about; all of us sharing in God's own life. This is the meaning of the salvation we celebrate, that through the Body and Blood of Christ, we are made ready to live forever with God in his eternal Kingdom.