

Reflection for Corpus Christi Sunday 2022

Our second reading today from St Paul gives us the earliest account of the memorial which Jesus left us of his suffering, death and resurrection. It consisted of bread over which the words *“This is my body, which is for you”* and wine over which the words *“This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood”* had been spoken. Why the two elements, bread and wine? Wouldn't one be sufficient? Surely Jesus could simply have left the blessed bread as his memorial? Indeed, throughout much of the church's history and now, once again because of Covid hygiene worries, that is how most people experience this memorial, the wine figuring only in the prayer and communion of the priest. Or perhaps Jesus could have simply left the cup of wine as his memorial. Why the two elements, bread and wine?

It's probably tied in with the towering, if mysterious, figure of Melchizedek who a whole 1,700 years before the birth of Jesus came to Abram bringing *“bread and wine”* and *“pronounced a blessing”*. The shortened account we heard in the first reading doesn't really do justice to the story of Melchizedek who is described as both *“king”* and *“priest of God Most High”*. He was clearly a significant figure who is able to act in the name of God Most High and bless Abram on his behalf. His importance is underlined by the fact that Abram responded by giving him *“a tithe [or tenth] of everything”*. No-one knew of Melchizedek's lineage; he is credited with no ancestors and no successors, and so in Jewish theology he is thought to have no beginning and no end. That is why today's Psalm, written seven hundred years after Abram and a thousand years before Jesus refers to Melchizedek as *“a priest forever.”*

In giving both bread and wine Jesus is identifying himself as the new, eternal *“priest of God Most High”* whose priesthood endures without end. He too has no beginning and no end, and he acts on behalf of God Most High. He brings bread and wine which are his body broken and his blood poured out on the cross and with them offers a blessing to the fallen human race restoring them to God's friendship.

Jesus could indeed have left the memorial to his suffering, death and resurrection under the form of bread alone, or under the form of wine alone, but it wouldn't have made all the symbolic connections with Melchizedek - and Jesus, like Melchizedek is both *“king”* and *“priest of God Most High”*. And that is why on today's feast of the Lord's body and blood Melchizedek features so prominently because he teaches us so much about the nature of Christ's priesthood.

Today's feast day of the Lord's body and blood isn't simply about the sacrament of the Eucharist but also about Christ's sacrifice on the cross and about his priesthood.