

Rev. Derek Fairman

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ A

This day the Church celebrates her belief in the true presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The Lord Jesus gives us Himself as a gift at every Mass, so that we might partake in His life. The Lord has given us so much.

One of the phrases that we might be familiar with concerning the Eucharist is that the Eucharist is the Bread of Angels or the Food of Angels. We hear this for instance in the optional sequence prescribed for the Solemnity we celebrate, the *Laud O Zion* written by St. Thomas Aquinas. We listen to St. Thomas' words sing of the Food of Angels. What did St. Thomas mean? Where does this come from?

Well, this phrase finds its origin in the Scriptures. Psalm 78 teaches us about the manna that came down for the Israelites in the desert. The food that they took from Egypt ran out and the Lord brought down the manna for them to eat in the desert. Psalm 78 calls this manna the bread of angels. Literally, it is the bread of the strong ones, which would not have been the Israelites. The idea is that the manna was bread that came from Heaven, where God and the angels live. The manna gave the Israelites strength. The manna prevented the Israelites from starving in the desert.

Another passage in which this phrase appears is the Book of Wisdom. The Book of Wisdom recounts the days when the Israelites were in the desert as well. As opposed to the Egyptians who were battered with storms from above, the Israelites received the food of angels from above. The bread from Heaven nourished the Israelites in every way. In fact, the Book of Wisdom tells us that the manna conformed to every taste and was endowed with all delights. The Book of Wisdom teaches us that the manna was not just heavenly bread because it came from above, but also it took on heavenly qualities. To taste the manna was to taste a bit of Heaven itself, because it was nourishing and contained all delights.

This helps us to understand a little more where the idea came from, that the Eucharist is the Bread of Angels. The manna that the Israelites received in the desert was a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. Certainly, if the manna could be called heavenly bread in some ways, the Eucharist is the true Bread from Heaven, and not just in some ways but in every way. The Lord Jesus has given us Himself, and He is the true Bread from Heaven and the Bread of Angels.

