

JUNE 6, 2021: CORPUS CHRISTI



Today we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi. This feast was added to the Church's calendar in the 13th century and the texts of the Mass, still used today, were written by Saint Thomas Aquinas. I love this celebration, but each year it reminds me of the various surveys that come out every few years about people's belief in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The surveys invariably show a declining belief in the true presence, and the question is always the same: why is this decline happening?

The Church's teaching comes right from the scriptures and is the consistent and uncompromising belief that, in the Eucharist, we receive what is really, truly, and substantially the humanity and divinity of Christ. It is the whole of Christ's body and soul and, therefore, is truly his body and blood that we receive; we do not receive a sign or a symbol. It is *not* bread and wine, simply acting as Christ's body and blood, to remind us of what Christ did for us. It is truly Christ and it is the whole of Christ. In our participation of the Eucharist we receive not simply the glorified Christ, separate from the Christ whose mission was on earth. The Christ we receive is the Christ who walked on this earth, teaching and preaching, who suffered and died for us, and who was resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven.

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the bread is transformed into the Body of Christ and the wine, into the Blood of Christ. We may struggle with this teaching as a Catholic, but if we deny it, we enter into heresy. We must believe this in the same way that we believe Christ truly died for us and rose from the dead. We must believe it in the same way that we believe Christ is truly God incarnate (fully human and fully divine—two natures in the one person of Jesus). We must believe it as we believe that God is Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit. It is not a teaching that is up for debate and, therefore, must be accepted.

And it is a difficult teaching. In Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John—in what is called the Bread of Life Discourse—Christ says, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me." For many of his disciples, this teaching was too hard to accept and so they walked away.

So, why do people walk away from this teaching? Why is this teaching so hard? I believe they walk away because they are afraid of what it means. If God is willing to do this for us, to take bread and wine and make it truly the Body and Blood of Christ, what does that mean for my life? If God is willing to act in such a radical way, then how am I suppose to respond to Him? The Eucharist is a radical teaching. The Eucharist is a difficult teaching, but *not* because it is hard to imagine that God can do it. Let us be clear that if the God of all creation—the God who created all that exists from nothing—chooses to change the nature of bread and wine, that really is not a difficult concept. Once you accept the teaching that all of creation came from nothing, then anything else God may choose to do should be pretty simple to accept.

But to accept the radical change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ calls for a radical response. It is easier to reject the teaching than to accept the radical call. It is easier to say God wouldn't do that than to recognize what He has done, and then to accept the radical conversion of life we are called to live in Christ. God gives us the Eucharist to strengthen us as we take up our cross each day and follow Christ.

What I am going to say next will sound harsh and judgmental to some, but I do not intend it that way: to *not* believe in the true teaching on the Eucharist is the coward's way out—it lets us off the hook. But, at the same time it challenges those who say they believe; it challenges them to look at their own lives. We may accept this challenge of believing in the Eucharist, but do our lives truly reflect our belief? Are we living a life of radical conversion to Christ? Are we living a life where we are adhering to Christ in all things? Are our lives so immersed in Christ that we have become his true presence in the lives of others? Or, have we taken the hypocrite's way out and speak about the teaching as true but do not live our life accordingly? As we eat his flesh and drink his blood, does his life truly flow within us?

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "F" and a long, sweeping underline.

Fr. Brian