

## Homily on Corpus Christi

This Sunday we celebrate the great Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, popularly known as “Corpus Christi” which, in Latin, means Body of Christ. What we are celebrating is the devotion and worship of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament. The great theologians of history were not the ones who decided to celebrate this day. The idea arose spontaneously through popular demand. It was in the XIII century that Pope Urban IV officially instituted this great solemnity in the universal Catholic Church.

Since the beginning of the Church, common people have shown their faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. From this faith spring the devotion to the Holy Eucharist not only in Mass but also outside of Mass. That means as Catholic we do believe that in every Holy Mass during the consecration the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and the Blood of Christ. And also we do believe that Our Lord, Jesus Christ, is present in the tabernacle.

This is the story Behind the Solemnity: St. Juliana was a nun who lived during the 13th century. For 20 years, she had visions of Jesus telling her that the Church needed a feast to celebrate the Eucharist. In her visions, the Church was represented as a full moon with one dark spot—the dark spot was the missing liturgical feast. She eventually told her confessor, and with her leave he consulted others, including Fr. James de Threzis, who later became Pope Urban IV.

In 1263 a German priest, Peter of Prague, stopped at Bolsena while on a pilgrimage to Rome. He is described as being a pious priest, but one who found it difficult to believe that Christ was actually present in the consecrated Host. While celebrating Holy Mass above the tomb of St. Christina, he had barely spoken the words of Consecration when blood started to seep from the consecrated Host and trickle over his hands onto the altar and the corporal. The priest was immediately confused. At first he attempted to hide the blood, but then he interrupted the Mass and asked to be taken to the neighboring city of Orvieto, the city where Pope Urban IV was then residing. The Pope listened to the priest's account and absolved him. He then sent emissaries for an immediate investigation. When all the facts were ascertained, the Pope exhibited this Most Holy Eucharist in the Cathedral of Bolsena-Orvieto, Italy. Remembering the visions of St. Juliana, Pope Urban Pope published a papal bull instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi as a Church Solemnity. He also commissioned St. Thomas Aquinas to compose hymns for the new solemnity—hymns such as *Pange Lingua*, *Tantum Ergo*, *Panis Angelicus*, and *O Salutaris Hostia*—which we still sing today.

There are people who say, “Why should we celebrate the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist? Christ is present everywhere?” Well, yes, Christ is present in all places. We see his presence in nature and it is reflected in honest and true human relationships and he is also present in the Holy Catholic Church that he founded. The presence of the Lord is indisputable anywhere in the world where the Church prays, teaches, preaches or does charitable work. But, since that first Holy Thursday, when Christ ate his last Supper with the apostles, when Jesus took the bread and said, “this is my body,” and when he took the cup and said, “this is my blood,” the Lord has

been truly present, God and man, wholly and entirely, in the Holy Eucharist. Since then, whenever the Holy Mass is celebrated, the bread and the wine are transformed, by the work of the Holy Spirit, into the Body and Blood of Our Lord. This is a dogma of faith and anyone who does not believe this is either not Catholic or is Catholic in name only.

The Church has tried to highlight the reverence we should have for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist in different occasions, they are: benediction with the Holy Eucharist, Eucharistic processions, prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, the genuflections that we should be making when we pass before the tabernacle, and the reverence that we should show when the tabernacle is opened. In all of these ways we show our faith and adoration.

1 Cor 11:23-25 is short but it contains the oldest account in existence of what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper. The letter was written, more or less, twenty years after the death of Jesus. In it Saint Paul tells the Corinthians, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” It was Jesus himself who told the Apostles that the bread and wine are changed into his Body and Blood. This is the mystery of this Most Blessed Sacrament.

For many people Mother Teresa of Calcutta was a little woman with tireless energy. She was a woman of joy, of tender compassion and of love. Yet, where did Mother Teresa find the energy and the strength to serve the poorest of the poor? What is it that makes us look to her today? The answer is simple and clear: Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. She says “without the

Eucharist we are nothing, but with the Eucharist - the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus - we have everything". This was her secret, the secret which is present in all of our Catholic Churches. For she said, "Where will you get the joy of loving?-in the Eucharist, Holy Communion. Jesus has made Himself the Bread of Life to give us life. Night and day, He is there. If you really want to grow in love, come back to the Eucharist, come back to that adoration."

At St. Louis Catholic Church, we are so fortunate! We have the opportunity to proclaim to the world the real presence of Christ 24/7 in our "Bread of Life" adoration chapel. Can you imagine the amount of blessings coming to our parish and the lives of our people because of all these holy people spending time before the Most Blessed Sacrament? This Sunday we are taking that blessing to a new level by having a huge Corpus Christi procession. We will be erecting and decorating four altar stations outside of the church for the procession. The four altars represent the four directions of the compass, showing that Christ's presence among us is universal.

Here is what Jesus says: *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you* (John 6:53). Remember in the Book of Exodus that the people in the desert were without food and feared for their lives. So God gave them bread from Heaven called "manna" that they collected each morning. Without eating that bread from Heaven they would never have made it to the Promised Land; they would have died in the desert. It is the same with us. Without receiving Jesus, our Living Manna from Heaven, in Holy Communion we will not make it to our Promised

Land of Heaven! I guess it's not just a ritual after all; it is essential for our survival.

My dear brothers and sisters, as we celebrate the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, let us believe in the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. May our attitude when we receive the Holy Eucharist today and always show that we really believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord!

O Sacrament most holy,  
O Sacrament divine,  
All praise and all thanksgiving  
Be every moment thine.