

THE PASTOR'S CORNER

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

(and some further thoughts about Restored Order)

*O sacred banquet!
in which Christ is received,
the memory of his Passion is renewed,*

*the mind is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory to us is given.
(O sacrum convivium!)*

THE STORY WENT that while traveling to Rome on pilgrimage one August in 1263, a German priest named Peter of Prague stopped to celebrate Mass at a local church in Bolsena, Italy. Though pious, he admittedly had difficulties with the Church's teaching about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As he said the words of consecration - Jesus's words at the Last Supper - blood poured out from the Host, over his hands, and upon the linen cloth (*corporal*) which was placed upon the altar underneath the chalice and paten which held the sacred species. Aware that Pope Urban IV was summering in the neighboring mountain town of Orvieto to escape the Roman heat, Father Peter went straight away to report what had happened. Urban had the local bishop bring the Host and the linen to him and immediately had these relics enshrined in the local cathedral.

A year later, the Pope initiated a feast to celebrate the Most Holy Body and Blood of the Lord or Corpus Christi commissioning St. Thomas Aquinas, to compose the liturgy.

The familiar hymn *Pange Lingua*, sung when the Holy Eucharist is reposed on Holy Thursday night, and its final stanza, *Tantum Ergo Sacramentum*, often sung at exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, should be very familiar to Catholics. Thomas' *Adoro Te Devote*, a hymn he wrote apparently for private devotion, is a beautiful poem to what the Second Vatican Council described as the "source and summit" of Catholic worship.

The words "communion" and "source and summit" remind us of the whole point of Catholic "religion" which is to bring us into an intimate relationship - while in this life - with God. Baptism marks that moment when this infusion into *new life* begins. In the first of the sacraments of initiation, the soul is freed from the primordial impediment (Original Sin) to the possibility of knowing and loving the One who knew us before we were conceived in

the womb (Jeremiah 1:5), formed anew as a child of God, and prepared for the maturation of the person in the very image and likeness of God. (Genesis 1:27). This growth rests upon both family, by the example of their love of God, and the Church, which shares the other sacraments of initiation to bring our journey to its fullness.

In Confirmation, the second of the sacraments of initiation, the soul of the child (or adult) is oriented further toward this relationship of communion with God. Bestowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Sacrament is normally administered by a bishop as the occasion of grace which binds the person more completely

to a community of faith (it could be said to make the point). This reality has been grasped by the Church from her earliest days as well as in the Orthodox Church and now, here in our parish, in the practice of the *Restored Order* of the Sacraments. In that crucial prayer of the Mass, "the Lord's Prayer," we are reminded that full experience of our Holy Communion with the Lord includes a community. "Our Father" accomplishes God's



"The miracle of Bolsena" - fresco (1357-1364) by Ugolino di Prete Ilario and followers - Cathedral of Orvieto

intention; "My Father" compromises it.

In this then, it should be easy to understand the logic of receiving Confirmation before Communion. When in his wisdom Pope Pius X decided that children who have reached the "age of discretion" were ready to receive Holy Communion, he understood what every primary school teacher knows: that children of the age of seven or eight have reached a decidedly more social stage in their life, beginning to move beyond the protected environment of home and family, able to recognize the differences in others. By nature, they are ready to be part of the human community (even at this age!); by the grace of Confirmation, they are ready to come to the fullness of (Holy) Communion, which is every bit as much for their salvation as for ours!