

Corpus Christi Sunday, 11 June 2023

Scriptures: Deut. 8:2-3,14b-16a; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; John 6:51-58

Homily: Fr. Ken

On April 9th, this year, the world celebrated Easter--most people by way of television and assorted AI devices. Then followed the Easter season and the feasts of the Ascension, Pentecost, The Holy Trinity, and finally this weekend, the feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (*Corpus Christi*).

Today's Gospel is a foundation document for us. From the very beginning, the first Christians assembled in private homes and re-lived the Last Supper; and Communion was taken to the sick people who could not come. St. Justin the Martyr describes this for us in the very early second century. So, the Mass and Holy Communion, are as old as the Church itself. As was logical, the custom developed of keeping hosts for Holy Communion somewhere safe, so that they would be available to the priest or deacon in an emergency.

If we had ventured into a church during the tenth century, we would not have seen a tabernacle as we have today, but rather a dove-shaped container suspended above the altar. It was called a pyx, and the Blessed Sacrament could be placed inside. In time, people gradually came to reflect on the significance of this.

Jesus is present. This is the body and blood of the risen and living Lord. He deserves our attention, indeed our adoration, not only at the moment of Communion, but whenever we come into the church. The great theological scholar of the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas, wrote superb hymns in praise of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, some of which are still sung today.

In time, the custom developed of carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession, for the veneration of believers. Thus, the Church, acknowledging at last the full dimension and spiritual significance of this glorious gift, officially launched the summertime feast of Corpus Christi, known now as "The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ".

In many countries today throughout the Christian world, especially in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, there are Catholic processions through the streets of towns and villages, with people singing and honoring the Blessed Sacrament. It is carried in the precious casing of the monstrance: children scatter rose petals, citizens hang colored banners out their windows, and the town bands play in celebration of the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ.

Here, in the vestibule of our St. Rita Church, parishioners can view large photographs of the annual Guatemalan Corpus Christi hours-long procession held in the town of Santiago Atitlan, with the participation of the members of our own St. Rita delegation.

Many spiritual writers have been inspired by St. Paul's retelling of the Last Supper narrative to the early community of Christians living in Corinth, part of which is found in today's second reading. Knowing how precious and special the Eucharist is to that Christian community, St. Paul simply relates to them what was said and what was done at the Last Supper. His intention was to help them come to a deeper understanding and a fuller appreciation of what Jesus was doing.

In his letter to the Christians living in Corinth, St. Paul became aware that not all the newly baptized Christians were celebrating the Lord's Supper. Some had drifted away from the group, eating and partying only with their own friends and excluding the rest. And they were drinking too much. In fact, some people were going hungry while others were getting drunk. St. Paul calls them to account. He tells them the true meaning of the Last Supper,

what actually happened, explaining that this was all received from Jesus and he is now passing it on to the community.

St. Paul relates what was said on the night Jesus was betrayed. He tells the Corinthians, and tells us today, that Jesus took the bread in his hands and actually said: "This is my body, which is for you". And, that when he lifted up the cup of wine he said "This cup is the new covenant in my blood".

Sometimes when people come to Mass, they can feel completely unworthy of receiving our Lord in Holy Communion. Their feelings of unworthiness may come from within themselves, or perhaps other people may have laid a sense of guilt or unworthiness upon them. Wherever those feelings of unworthiness originate, when we come to Mass, it is Jesus who is inviting us to be in union, in communion, with him.

No one, of course, receives the body and blood of Christ because he or she has earned it or has been a totally good sinless person. All of us are sinners, and we confess that fact at the very beginning of every Mass, and God forgives us. However, we are all invited by Jesus to come and eat and drink. That is, we do not go to Communion because we are good, but rather we go to Communion to help us to be good.

When we are at Mass, we can pray. In our hearts we can have quiet, prolonged, personal conversation with Jesus. This is the center of all prayer.

This weekend we can focus our prayer on the full beauty of the Eucharist Jesus has given us. May we always experience the gentle presence of Jesus, drawing us to himself.

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