

Corpus Christi Sunday, 19 June 2022

Scriptures: Genesis 14:18-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Luke 9:11b-17

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the vestibule of our Church, in the glassed-in enclosure, you will see photographs from one of our Guatemalan delegations. A number of pictures show the annual Corpus Christi procession through the decorated streets of Santiago Atitlan.

Corpus Christi is a major religious celebration in countries throughout the world, and certainly in Latin America.

Today's Gospel is a foundation document for us. From the very beginning, Christians gathered in private homes and relived the Last Supper; and Communion was also taken to the sick people who could not attend. St. Justin Martyr describes this for us, writing in the very early 2nd century. So, the Mass, and Holy Communion, are as old as the Church itself. 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 you had gone into a church in the tenth century, you would not have seen a tabernacle, but rather a dove-shaped container hanging above the altar. It was called a pyx, and the Blessed Sacrament could be placed inside. Over time, people reflected and meditated 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 saint and scholar of the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, wrote superb hymns in praise of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, some hymns of which are still sung today.

The custom developed of carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession, for the veneration of believers. So the Church, having come to a deeper appreciation of the full dimension of this glorious gift that the Church has always had, launched the early summertime feast of Corpus Christi, "The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ". As noted, in many countries there are religious processions through the streets, with the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance, with children scattering rose petals, and citizens hanging colored banners from their windows, and local bands playing music.

A few years ago, the feast of Corpus Christi occurred during our St. Rita delegation to Guatemala, as you can see in the photographs in the vestibule. I was invited to concelebrate the Mass, and their pastor asked me to lead the procession carrying the monstrance inside of which was the consecrated host of the Blessed Sacrament.

What about each of us on this Corpus Christi feast day? At the Communion of our Mass, we receive Christ into our life. In the tabernacle of our Church, Our Lord Jesus Christ is alive and welcoming. The sanctuary candle, always with a lit flame, is a sign of that presence of Jesus. Christ invites us to come and spend time with him. The tabernacle is a place for face-to-face encounter. The face of Jesus is a challenging face, but also a smiling face, an understanding face, an engaging face, a forgiving face, a true face of mercy. With Jesus, we can have that quiet, prolonged, personal conversation that is at the heart of all prayer.

On this weekend when we celebrate Father's Day, we can pray for all of our fathers, living and deceased, remembering each of them especially at Communion.

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