

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi-2006

Homily for June 18th: Ex. 24:3-8; Heb. 9:11-15; Mk. 14: 12-16, 22-26

By Father Jose Uppani

Today, we are celebrating the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. This practice of celebrating Corpus Christi as a feast, had its origin in the pleadings and petitions of the [13th century Augustinian nun Saint Juliana of Liège](#). (By the way, Corpus Christi is the Latin term for the Body and Blood of Christ). At the age of sixteen, before she joined the convent, she had a vision of a silver moon with a small section altered. While deep in prayer, the Lord explained that the moon was the ritual year of the Church, and the altered area meant something was incomplete. The missing part was the absence of a feast to celebrate the Blessed Sacrament. And God told Juliana that he wanted to have a feast of the Blessed Sacrament celebrated in due solemnity. For years, Juliana did not act upon the vision. Twenty years later, due to the persistent divine urge to reveal the divine will about the feast, she finally communicated this to the Bishop of Liege. He believed her and in consultation with the later Pope Urban IV celebrated this feast in 1246 for the first time.

But it remained to receive universal acceptance. Then a miracle occurred in 1263 at a town called Bolsena while Father Peter of Prague was leading the celebration of the holy Mass. Though a godly man, this priest was ignorant of the fact that Christ was present in the Blessed Sacrament. Blood began to issue out from the Host as he was speaking the words of Consecration. The blood flowed down his arms and drenched the whole altar. He was very confused, and he stopped the Mass and rushed to see Pope Urban IV in Orvieto a neighbouring town. The Pope listened and analyzed the whole phenomenon. He concluded that it was a great miracle and issued the [papal bull *Transiturus*](#) in [1264](#) in which the feast of Corpus Christi was made a feast of the Universal Church. Thus the Feast of the Corpus Christi came to be celebrated in the entire Church.

God explained the need to St. Juliana by giving her three reasons why He wanted a feast like this. The first reason was to strengthen the Catholic belief in the Eucharist. Secondly, it would encourage people to be virtuous and draw strength from the Sacrament. Lastly, it would be a compensation for all the abuse and sacrilegious acts so widely done against the Eucharist. Let us reflect a little bit on each of these goals of this feast.

First, let us reflect on the Catholic view of the Eucharist. Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches thus: “At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us” (ccc 1323). From this it is clear that, “*the Eucharist is the heart and summit of the Christian life for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father*” and “*by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church.*” (ccc. 1407). Hence, every Catholic who celebrates the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Mass is privileged to stand at the foot of the Cross in Calvary and personalize (appropriate) the Salvation Christ accomplished for all by His Death. “The Mass is at the same time the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood. ...To receive communion is to receive Christ himself who has offered himself for us” (ccc 1382). Hence, St. Thomas Aquinas says: “ No other sacrament has greater healing power; through it sins are purged away, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift” (Opusculum 57, in festo Corporis Christi, lect. 1-4). This teaching is based on the Scripture we heard in the second reading: “if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God” (Heb. 9: 13-14).

So, the second goal of the feast of Corpus Christi, namely to encourage us to be virtuous and to draw strength from the Sacrament is the outcome of true faith in the Holy Eucharist. In the role of the priestly class privileged to celebrate the Mass presided over by a priest who acts in the capacity of the Person of Christ, how much holy each

one of us should be! *“Holy Communion augments our union with Christ”* (ccc 1393). The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." Life in Christ has its foundation in the Eucharistic banquet: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (Ccc. 1391). The Catechism says, *“Holy Communion separates us from sin”* (ccc1393). Again, “by giving himself to us Christ revives our love and enables us to break our disordered attachments to creatures and root ourselves in him: Since Christ died for us out of love, when we celebrate the memorial of his death at the moment of sacrifice we ask that love may be granted to us by the coming of the Holy Spirit. We humbly pray that in the strength of this love by which Christ willed to die for us, we, by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, may be able to consider the world as crucified for us, and to be ourselves as crucified to the world.... Having received the gift of love, let us die to sin and live for God” (ccc1394).

Thirdly, celebration of this feast has to help us to make compensation for the abuse and the sacrilegious acts against the Eucharist. How can we do that? A couple of things can be considered:

- (1) Be very particular to celebrate the Mass with due interior disposition. First of all, it means making all efforts to live in the state of grace throughout the week and make confession in case you happen to commit a mortal sin immediately or at least before the celebration of the next Mass. It also includes preparing our soul to be worthy enough to receive the inexhaustible graces of the Eucharist by fervent prayer, fasting (one hour), prior meditation of the Readings, and immersing in the Sacred Mysteries with our whole mind and heart.
- (2) Exterior disposition is also very important because we are participating in the very Sacrifice of the Mass which is precisely the offering of Christ's Body as victim. The Catechism says: “Bodily demeanor such as gestures and clothing ought to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest” (ccc 1387). If we show the common sense to wear modest clothes for a funeral, out of the respect for the dead body, how much more should we be modest in our dressing when we come for the Eucharist? If we do not choose to attend a wedding ceremony in shorts, how much more should we be careful in not wearing such dresses in church, no matter how hot the weather would be! Wearing shorts that are too short or dresses that reveal too much of your body is certainly inappropriate and against the spirit of Sacred Liturgy. We need to constantly educate our children too in this regard. Coming late or quitting before the end of the Mass, conversation or gestures, except in emergencies during the Mass or at the time of Adoration, expressions of mutual love either in the Adoration Chapel or during Mass except that of sharing of peace, indifferent participation in the Mass etc. are of course signs of disrespect to the Eucharistic Lord. When we have an opportunity to do something in the Church, besides Mass, for example, a rehearsal of wedding we need to take extra care not to forget about the Real Presence and such occasions should be consciously used to bear witness to our Catholic Faith before our non-Catholic brethren.
- (3) Finally, Adoring the Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament is another important expression of our faith in the Eucharist. How can a person who really believe that Christ is truly present in the Sacred host can not but come to the Perpetual Adoration Chapel on a regular basis and stay with the Lord for a considerable time? The Catechism says, “Because Christ himself is present in the sacrament of the altar, he is to be honored with the worship of adoration. "To visit the Blessed Sacrament is . . . a proof of gratitude, an expression of love, and a duty of adoration toward Christ our Lord"(ccc 1418). Let this feast of Corpus Christi give all those who haven't started to spend an hour a week for Adoration be inspired to do so from today onwards.

Dear brothers and sisters, remember not the fact that every day Jesus invites us to have Supper with Him: ‘Happy (Blessed) are those who are called to His Supper’! Let us be truly thankful to God for being a Catholic, privileged to participate in the real Sacrifice of Calvary and to receive the very same body of the Risen Lord in the Mass everyday. Let us eat His Body being conscious of its saving power and drink His Blood from His very pierced side with a heart burning with love and gratitude.

