

Solemnity of Corpus Christi (A)

June 22, 2014.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me (Jn. 6:51).

As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ or *Corpus Christi* as it is traditionally known, we celebrate the Church's greatest treasure, the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. Today's celebration, incidentally the 750th anniversary of the establishment of this Feast, teaches us everything we need to know for the pilgrimage of faith which leads to the eternal vision of the living God. In the Gospel of the Mass, Our Lord speaks of the reality of His presence in the Holy Eucharist and of the mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*) of God and man that is effected through what we logically call Holy Communion. In our first reading, the great gift of the Eucharist is prefigured in the manna which sustained the Israelites in the desert. *He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, in order to show you that not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3).* A food unknown; the very same could be said of the living Bread that is the Eucharist. Our Gospel reading is taken from our Lord's Eucharistic discourse, in which He makes known the truth of Eucharist. *I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world (Jn. 6:51).* At the Last Supper, which our second reading recalls, our Lord connects the Eucharist to the Sacrifice of the Cross. *For this is my Body which will be given up for you...For this is the Chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal Covenant.* Through the ages, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, this *food unknown* becomes known and loved and adored and cherished; so much so that those who receive it with discernment are transformed into our Lord's likeness. Their lives become profoundly Eucharistic. It may be said that in the Eucharist a twofold knowledge is conferred, knowledge of God and knowledge of self; God who is self-giving Love gives Himself to me, a creature created to share this love. In the Eucharistic Mystery these words of the Apostle are already partially fulfilled: *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 Cor. 13:12).* Yes, this Sacrament, the Most Blessed Sacrament tells us *everything* we need to know about God and about man.

The Church is Eucharistic in her very essence because Eucharistic Love is no less God's nature, fully revealed in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. All our efforts, at every level serve this Mystery. As your priests, our desire is that you, each one of you, lead a profoundly Eucharistic life; a life of generous love and service, of piety and reverence; a life that already here shares in the divine life that God bestows on us through grace and which He sustains and nourishes through the precious Body and Blood of Christ. When this Mystery of God here and truly substantially present in the Eucharist becomes our deepest conviction, then everything changes and every detail surrounding this Mystery has meaning. Indeed, no honour is too great for this Mystery for God is truly here. *Quantum potes, tantum aude: Quia major omni laude, Nec laudare sufficis* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=We9s9Zh8Rdk>).

On this Feast that celebrates the greatest treasure that the Church possesses, I would like to share with you the insights of a holy Bishop from Kazakhstan. In an interview recently given in England, Bishop Athanasius Schneider observed that the Church today is living through a tremendous crisis

over doctrine and liturgy; in his estimation, the fourth great crisis in the Church's history. Of this crisis he says that *the deepest wound in the actual crisis of the Church is the Eucharistic wound, the abuses of the Blessed Sacrament*. I quote: *There is also the question of the objectively irreverent reception of Holy Communion. The so-called new, modern manner of receiving Holy Communion directly into the hand is very serious because it exposes Christ to an enormous banality.... Here is at stake the most holy, the most divine and concrete on Earth. Of course there are people who receive Holy Communion in the hand with much devotion and faith, but they are in a minority. The vast mass, though, are losing the faith through this very banal manner of taking Holy Communion like common food, like a chip or a cake. Such a manner to receive the most Holy here on earth is not sacred, and it destroys by time the deep awareness and the Catholic faith in the real presence and in the transubstantiation.* As disturbing as this is, these are symptoms of a deeper problem also articulated by this saintly bishop. *The real crisis of the Church is anthropocentrism, forgetting the Christocentrism. Indeed, this is the deepest evil, when man or the clergy are putting themselves in the centre when they are celebrating liturgy and when they are changing the revealed truth of God, e.g. concerning the Sixth Commandment and human sexuality. The crisis reveals itself also in the manner in which the Eucharistic Lord is treated. The Eucharist is at the heart of the Church. When the heart is weak, the whole body is weak. So when the practice around the Eucharist is weak, then the heart and the life of the Church is weak. And when people have no more supernatural vision of God in the Eucharist then they will start the worship of man, and then also doctrine will change to the desire of man* (<http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2014/06/bishop-athanasius-schneider-in-england.html>).

This crisis places us in a position not unlike that of the Church in the earliest centuries, when the majority of society was pagan and Christians were discriminated and persecuted. The Catholic Church has been and continues to be the greatest servant of humanity but the Church has always proclaimed the primacy of God. Our first duty as human beings however, is to adore God as we do at Holy Mass, in Eucharistic adoration or in visiting the Blessed Sacrament. From a true adoration and love of God grows our love for the poor and our neighbour. The consequence of Eucharistic piety and reverence is service of and reverence also for the poor. This is how we can renew our world so afflicted with so much violence, both physical as we see it happening in the Middle East and the moral and spiritual violence that threatens our own society. The time has come for us to reconsider some of our practices and policies. Evidently, the mass apostasy that our times have witnessed is not without its dire consequences. *We pray as we live because we live as we pray* (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2725). These words which you have heard so often summarize the ancient Christian adage: *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi: the norm of praying is the norm of believing is the norm of living*. The Mass teaches us that man has been created to share God's own life *which is foreshadowed in the present age by our reception of [our Lord's] precious Body and Blood* (Prayer after Communion, Corpus Christi, *The Roman Missal*). Each and every time that we receive our Lord worthily, whenever we adore Him present in the most Blessed Sacrament our union with Him deepens and He transforms and transfigures our lives; such that they become truly Eucharistic – that is to say, godly. This can only happen through adoration which is profound love; but our love has grown cold, and consequently, so have our lives. Perhaps the most disturbing development of all is the banal indifference that so many have to life. The renewal of our own lives can only take place through the gift of transforming grace and that grace requires of us a willingness to become what we receive. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta said, *In each of our lives Jesus comes as the Bread of Life - to be eaten, to be consumed by us. This is how He loves us. Then Jesus comes in our human life as the hungry one, the other, hoping to be fed with the Bread of our life, our hearts by loving,*

and our hands by serving. In loving and serving, we prove that we have been created in the likeness of God, for God is Love and when we love we are like God. The Christian faith quite simply, is Eucharistic. The Eucharist affirms the truth of the Incarnation; indeed, it makes this Mystery present in our midst; in the Tabernacle, Jesus is truly God with us – physically present. Are we sufficiently aware of this truth?

In the pilgrimage of faith that is our life it is not difficult to lose one's way; but it is not impossible to find it again or to remain steadfast on the path of discipleship. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the sacred liturgy, this is the source and the summit of our life. Here we learn again and again, and please God, always in a deeper and more meaningful manner, that our call to discipleship is a call to holiness, to perfection. Our Lord says, *You, therefore, must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt. 5:48). In the Eucharist, the food for our journey (*viaticum*) our Lord provides us with both the path and the purpose of this journey; and the purpose is our transformation in Christ. On this Feast of Corpus Christi, may our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament obtain for us a true love and devotion for our Eucharistic Lord; so that *we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, [may be] changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another* (2 Cor. 3:18).