

Solemnity of Corpus Christi (B)

June 7, 2015. *Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:14).*

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. Though the Institution of the Holy Eucharist is celebrated yearly on Holy Thursday, *Corpus Christi* celebrates in a particular manner the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and the transforming power of Christ our Lord. Today, throughout the world where this Feast is celebrated there will be exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Benediction and Processions and all manner of expressions of devotion that lead us to the very heart of our faith for *in the Eucharist, Christ Jesus, risen and glorified, reveals the enduring reality of his Incarnation. He remains living and real in our midst in order to nourish his disciples with his Body and Blood* (Pope St. John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 11). The *Corpus Christi* Procession specifically, is a reminder that we are to share the gift of the Eucharist with the world and a bold proclamation of our belief in the Real Presence.

Our Gospel reading records for us the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. The memorial of our Lord's Passion and Death has perpetuated His saving Sacrifice through the ages in the act of worship that is most correctly termed the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Holy Communion is the fruit of the Sacrifice and those who receive it with discernment are transformed into our Lord's likeness. Their lives become profoundly Eucharistic.

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 – we who confect the Eucharist through the offering of the Mass, 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 and its reverent celebration has profound meaning. Everything changes because the Eucharist gives us a clear and definitive purpose to our life. It could be said that the Eucharist reveals to us the truth of what Pope Benedict spoke of as an *ecology of man*. Ecology and concern for the environment and nature are at the forefront of political and economic discourse in our day. One thing is absolutely clear when one speaks of the natural order: there is nothing purposeless, and, the abuse or perversion of the natural order brings with it dire consequences. Human nature is no different. Pope Benedict XVI wisely observed: *There is also an ecology of man. Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he listens to his nature, respects it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled.* The mystery of the Eucharist, especially the reception of Holy Communion, affirms this truth. It is God who nourishes us and gives direction to our lives. Our nature, created by God, is ordered to share God's own life.

Though we often speak of Christ our Lord descending from Heaven to be with us, in the sacred liturgy, specifically in the Eucharistic Prayer (Canon) it is we who ascend heavenward through the sacred species of the Eucharist. This is another aspect of our tradition which speaks of the Mass as *a joining-in with the perpetual heavenly Mass, from the Sanctus when we lift up our hearts and sing with the angels, to the invitation 'Ecce Agnus Dei' when we are invited to partake of the Lamb who reigns in the City of God, our faint participation in what the angels enjoy in heaven. The sacramental species become, so to speak, a miraculous portal which pulls us upwards and inwards—a small rent in the veil, through which we can peer into glory* (<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2015/06/going-up-to-heaven-with-blessed.html#.VXH1OWfbKt8>). The movement is upwards and we strain to be one with those who enjoy the fullness of the Beatific Vision. This is why St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of the Eucharist as the pledge of our future glory (*pignus future glorie*). We who participate in the earthly offering and who receive Holy Communion are divinized though not fully yet as when we will see God in the Beatific Vision. It is in the liturgy that we understand our true nature and purpose. In a world so obviously confused about the nature and purpose of human life, the sacred liturgy rightly celebrated is a most effective tool of evangelization. In the sacred liturgy it is our Lord Himself who speaks to us and whose grace is at work in and through us, perfecting our nature and transforming it so that it might participate in the very life of God Himself. We who participate in the offering at the Altar participate in the heavenly offering of Christ our Lord who has suffered for us. Thus the Mass takes us up to Heaven and for this reason, when the Mass is celebrated with reverence, love and devotion it truly becomes *the most beautiful thing this side of Heaven*. When we receive Holy Communion we are as it were, re-located at the throne of the Lamb; and this is no less true of Eucharistic adoration.

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>). It is an undeniable and sorrowful fact that the majority of Catholics no longer attend Holy Mass on Sunday with any degree of regularity. It has been observed that we are living through a Eucharistic crisis that evidently attacks the very heart of the Church. 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 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 Mass is indeed *the most beautiful thing this side of Heaven*; and it is no less the feast and school of faith where our nature created and destined to share God's own life is nurtured and perfected. May our celebration of *Corpus Christi* be for us the ideal for our weekly celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The worship of the living God in Christ is the greatest affirmation of our human dignity and the source and summit of all human activity rightly ordered for *we pray as we live because we live as we pray* (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2725).