

Today's Feast of Corpus Christi commemorates a Eucharistic miracle which occurred in the town of Bolsena in 1263. A visiting priest who had been struggling to believe in Christ's presence in the Eucharist was there celebrating mass. During the consecration, the host started bleeding so heavily that it stained the altar and all of the linens. In shock, the priest ran to the nearby town of Orvieto to tell the Pope what occurred. Pope Urban IV investigated the miracle and one year later instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi for the entire Church. To this day, a Eucharistic procession is held both in Orvieto and Bolsena in honor of this miracle. The procession in Bolsena is especially impressive because the streets are prepared for the procession with beautiful images made out of a mosaic of flower petals.

Usually, on this Feast Day we focus on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Today, however, I want to focus us in on a different aspect of the Body of Christ. Something that we hear often, but we often fail to reflect on, is that WE are the Body of Christ. In our second reading we heard, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

Again and again throughout his writings, Paul returns to this theme that the Church is the Body of Christ when we allow God to fill us with His Spirit. This unity, however, does not come easily. Our own human tendency for sin and Satan's attacks all serve to separate us from one another. Paul and the other early Christian writers spent a lot of time talking about the need to end divisions among ourselves and to live in the unity which we share in Christ. It is for this reason that Paul can proclaim to the Galatians, "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Satan wants to attack this Eucharistic communion with the Body and Blood of our Lord at its very heart. It is telling that the Gospel of Luke recounts how, at the Last Supper right after the consecration and reception of the first Eucharist, the Apostles immediately begin quarrelling with one another about who is the greatest. At the very moment when they should have been the most unified in Christ, they were divided because they were each seeking to place themselves first. We can only remain united as one Body in Christ when we each seek to be servants to one another. Just as the many grains of wheat can only become one host when they are mixed together and baked in the oven, so we can only become one Body in Christ when we are purified through the fire of sacrificial love.

It is in the reception of the Eucharist, more than anywhere else, that we become unified as one body in Christ. We find this truth echoed in the Eucharistic prayers themselves. For example, in the Third Eucharistic prayer after the consecration, the priest prays, “grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.” That is why we can never allow divisions and unity to come into this church. The Apostle James in his epistle warns us, “Brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you hold to the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the man in fine clothing and say, ‘Have a seat here please,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘stand there’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

It is especially in this place that we must fight to hold no distinctions among ourselves, and to love each other equally. Jesus once counseled us, “if you approach the altar and remember that you have quarreled with one of your brothers to leave your gift and go be reconciled with him.” This is why we exchange a sign of peace

as a Church before reception of the Eucharist. It is a way to make sure that we are at peace and reconciled with one another, to make sure that we truly are united in mind and heart before we become united through the reception of the Body and Blood of Our Lord.

For me, one of the most powerful moments of the mass is always the time for distribution of communion. As I am there staring into the faces of everyone coming forward proclaiming “The Body of Christ”, I am struck by the truth that we ourselves become and make up the Body of Christ. Every single face that I see, no matter who it might be, makes up the beautiful mosaic which is the Body of Christ to which we belong. I can only ponder what words Paul would have used if he were standing in my place. “In Christ, there is neither Caucasian nor Mexican, there is neither poor nor rich, there is neither male or female nor young or old; for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” Just as the streets of Bolsena are prepared for the Eucharist every year by a mosaic of beautiful images made out of flower petals, so too does Christ weave us together with all of our differences to make up a beautiful mosaic of His Body united for the salvation of the world.