

St Pius-St Anthony Homily Corpus Christi Sunday Year A

The Feast of Corpus Christi traditionally is remembered as a time of public processions (on church grounds, Diocesans wide celebrated at Mt St Joseph, or in a stadium where Eucharistic Hymns, litanies, and rosaries were offered with Adoration, or maybe following Mass, an extended time of the Blessed Sacrament being exposed, concluding with a grand Benediction. What all these WAYS of observing Corpus Christi have in common, is that they are all very public displays of Christ's REAL presence. What is this Real Presence, but how Jesus chose to 'remain' among His disciples, like in what form –well, the form of the offertory prayer (words-acts) of the Last Supper. Straight from the lips of Jesus in our gospel today, He says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." 6:56 This is His Way of saying 'I am with you & you with me' here, when you 'do this'. This is all so remarkable to me, how God chose... to keep revealing Himself after His ascension into heaven, and the descension of Holy Spirit onto or into the Church of His People as they spread out through the world. Again, to manifest His presence give a 'sign' of his 'staying with you' (Matt 28:20- 'with you always'-How? Here it is). It is amazing! Jesus chose to reveal himself most ordinarily extraordinarily in the Holy Eucharist. He is here, in every mass in every tabernacle in every reception of His Body and Blood in this sacrament of Holy Communion; like resurrection morning appearances in every mass!

Yet immediately, I know what question rises? But How does this work? Can we explain it in all satisfactory detail to everyone. No, but that is what faith is. If Peter and the apostles couldn't adequately explain to Thomas convincingly that Jesus appeared right there with them, then do I expect I alone will be able to fully account for the 'Process' of Jesus manifesting Himself in bread and wine become His Body and Blood. That is faith in Christ, the acceptance of things unseen, because just looking at the altar, well, it still looks like bread, looks like wine, but it is Christ's words and action that change everything, literally 'transubstantiates' (doctrinal word) everything. And note that there were questions like this from the beginning. As Jesus is teaching in today's gospel even, John 6:52 "there was quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?" I say, 'because of WHO-It is Jesus' He is the one establishes (or institutes this sacrament). He remains, He is present by the work of the Holy Spirit and our following our 'doing' (word and act) what Jesus said to 'do this in memory of me'. He honors His word, and just as we pray right before communion echoing the Centurion about to receive an inexplicable miracle too, in Matthew 8:8, he says, "Only say the word...." It happens; God's will, God's institution, by His own word.

Easy to understand? No? But it has been difficult to accept from the beginning; tragically we hear a few verses farther along in John 6 that some of the crowd and even his own disciples push back against Jesus parting ways over these statements, verse 66 says, 'many no longer accompanied him'. Parted company

Scripture used that word 'accompany' about accepting this teaching or not. Here is the great news. **Accompany!** What a divine word choice! Do you see the word **companion** in that? Who is a companion but someone who stays with you (maybe even when you can't explain things)? But the word, companion-and here is where it gets even greater. The Latin root for companion, is a person with you (co- or com) you or person with 'pan' for you. Pan is Latin for bread as in 'panis angelicus' Pan De Vida, or we hear in 'Panera' Bread store. So, Jesus I am staying with you, in the form of bread and wine become my Life-Body and Blood. He says, 'I am the living bread'- for you, my flesh for the life of the world. I know the sacrament overwhelms our senses, but that is God for you.

Again, I find the most meaning in the simple words Jesus states here. Yet, it continues on (of course) into the New Testament (examples in Acts of Apostles) when we hear about the repeated ritual, prayer times of the apostles and the early church in what they called the 'breaking of the bread', hymns and thanksgiving. Each time this service of prayer is offered, Jesus is there, shows up, is really present with them, just as we had heard in Luke 24:31 & 35 that Jesus was 'recognized' and 'made known to them in the breaking of bread'. That phrase is used at least five times in Acts of Apostles (2:42, 46; 20:7,11; 27:35) and Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:16. And I just want to close by drawing together this act of Jesus of breaking bread and the His accompanying His followers and their increasing communion with Him and one another as fellow companions to each other. A good question to keep praying about is 'why the 'breaking part'? What does the bread broken signify? Broken to share, to give & further distribute, feed and give life to more and more. Jesus does that for us. There is a great scene in the movie 'Nativity' put out a couple years ago (it came after the success of Mel Gibson's the 'Passion'- to give a video portrayal of Christ's birth too). In 'Nativity', while two great companions are traveling together to Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph stop one night to rest and take in a little dinner, and they are running a little short. Joseph reaches into his sack and pulls out a loaf and breaks it, saying, 'Mary, let's share the bread.' So he tears it and gives her half, and turns like he is biting and eating, and he puts the whole half back into the sack for another meal later. So they come to the next stop and he repeats the process. But they won't run out, God will provide. Watching that scene brought home to me that 'breaking' part of the breaking of bread; it's for sharing, for accompanying, for 'giving life to the world' Jesus does that for us. Breaks the bread of Himself to feed us, and give us life!