

## SOLEMNITY OF CORPUS CHRISTI

Year B: Ex 24:3-8; Ps 116; Heb 9:11-15; Mk 14:12-16, 22-26

June 6, 2021

Fr. David Pignato

After celebrating the Resurrection of Christ and the mystery of our redemption during the Easter season, and then honoring the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, followed by the Feast of the Holy Trinity last Sunday, the Church now turns to celebrate the mystery of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. As Christ taught us (cf. Jn 6:51-55), He is truly present in the Eucharist, which is not just a symbol, but is rather like an extension of the Incarnation in our own time and place – it is Christ Himself, truly present here with us. And this why we call the Eucharist the Most Blessed Sacrament and we honor and adore it as God on earth, as if we were seeing and speaking to Christ standing here before us.

Jesus gave us the Eucharist so that we can be united with Him. We call the Eucharist “Holy Communion,” because it gives us a deep spiritual communion with Christ, who comes to dwell within us, to strengthen us and assist us. Because the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ, when we receive Holy Communion, we receive Jesus Himself, who enters our souls in a mystical and mysterious way, to help us live a new life. Christ said, *“I am the bread of life. ... 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 6:48, 56-57). And this means that when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we can say with St. Paul, *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”* (Gal 2:20). Christ comes to live in us to direct us, and steer us, and motivate us.

The benefit of receiving the Eucharist is our sanctification, which means it makes us holy. A soul that receives the Eucharist worthily is a soul in which “divine grace has the upper hand” over all the inclinations to sin that threaten to bring us down (Ronald Knox, *Pastoral and Occasional Sermons*, 289). As one spiritual author puts it, “[This] should be our prayer, every time our Lord comes to us in [H]oly [C]ommunion; we want him to dominate in our souls, in the midst of his enemies – our souls are so full of his enemies, pride, covetousness, resentment, self-indulgence, ready to dispute every inch of territory with him” (Knox, 289). So, we want Christ to dominate in our souls. The weeds of sin can spring up in our souls, but by worthy reception of the Eucharist, we can douse these sins with the grace of God’s Real Presence. When we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, He goes to battle in our souls against all those unholy sentiments that threaten to bring us down and throw us off course.

But this great benefit of sanctification from the Eucharist happens only if we receive the Eucharist worthily. Because the Eucharist is really Christ Himself, it should always be received worthily. In one sense, none of us is ever worthy to receive Jesus Himself, but He *wants* us to receive Him in the Eucharist, as long as we are free from any grave sin. Worthy reception of the Eucharist means all our serious sins have been absolved in confession, before we receive Holy Communion. And it also means that we receive Holy Communion only if we are faithful to Christ and what He taught. Those who do *not* believe what Jesus taught, or do *not* attempt to live as He taught, should *not* receive the Eucharist. It would not be honest, and it would be a contradiction, to receive Jesus in the Eucharist while rejecting His teachings. It would just not be honest, and it would be a contradiction, to pretend we are in communion with Jesus, while not accepting His teachings.

What should unite us here in this parish, and in every Catholic parish, is an honest attempt and intention by all of us to receive the Eucharist worthily. No one should ever feel pressured to receive the Eucharist, especially if they know they are not properly disposed. But often, people who attend Mass feel a type of social pressure to get up and get in line for Holy Communion. *This should never be the case.* Over the past year, during the pandemic, many people chose not to receive the Eucharist for reasons of physical health and safety. It became perfectly acceptable to abstain from the Eucharist, and it is never anyone else's business why a person chooses not to receive Communion. And if physical health was thought to be a reason to abstain during the pandemic, spiritual health is an even more important reason to abstain from the Eucharist, if and when necessary. And, remember: the sacrament of confession is always available to help us become disposed to receive the Eucharist worthily. That's how the two sacraments work together.

In the Gospel, we heard the account of the Last Supper, the First Mass, when Christ instituted the Eucharist as the new and eternal form of worship: "*While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take it; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.'*" The Eucharist, which we honor on this Feast of Corpus Christi, is the Real Body and Blood of Christ, which was the price paid for our redemption. It is given to us as food from Heaven to sanctify us and make us holy. May we all strive to live in a way that is worthy of this great Sacrament.