

HOMILY ON CORPUS CHRISTI 2019 BY FATHER FRANCIS

Dear brothers and sisters, last Sunday we celebrated the solemnity of the Blessed Trinity. This Sunday, we are celebrating the solemnity of the *Corpus Christi*, the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. The feast of the Blessed Trinity celebrates the truth that our God is not the great unknown or impersonal force. Our God is not *Deus Otiosus*, or what we call today the dead beat dad (the watchmaker god of the Deists) as believed by some of our pioneer fathers like Thomas Jefferson. Our God has a name. He is the great I AM, Yahweh, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is not just one being among many. He is the *esse subsistens*. He is the ground for our existence. This God of ours is both transcendent and immanent. He is higher than heaven and earth yet he is closer to us than our collar bones. God is close to us. That is why Jesus our God is Emmanuel, meaning God with us. The feast of Corpus Christi makes this loud and clear. God, who took on human flesh in the womb of Virgin Mary, gave himself to us that we may eat of his flesh and drink of his blood. “As we eat his flesh that was sacrificed for us, we are made strong, and as we drink his Blood that was poured out for us, we are washed clean” (Preface of the Lord’s Supper, Holy Thursday).

The Holy Body and Blood of Christ we receive in the Eucharist is not a mere sign, convention or make believe. It is real. “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ?” (1Corinthians 10:16). Everything we do in the Church originates and derives its efficacy from the Mass. The document of the Second Vatican Council on the Liturgy states, “The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” (SC 10).

This is why we talk about real presence in relation to the Holy Eucharist. This means that Christ is truly, substantially and really present. You cannot spit out the Eucharist after you’ve received him nor should you receive him when your heart is not clean.

Some of us may think that the holy Mass or the Eucharist is an invention of the Catholic Church. But this is far from the truth. The Eucharist goes back to the *Logos*, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). This miracle did not have happen from the blues. It has long history in the OT and in the story of our salvation. The first hint of Eucharist is the passage in Genesis we read today. Melchizedek the priest of the Most High gave Abraham, our ancestor in faith, bread and wine and blessed him (Genesis 14:18-20). Whom does Melchizedek symbolize? The answer of course is the Christ Jesus, the king of peace and Lord of lords. Our ancestors lived on manna, bread from heaven, for forty years while on their journey to the Promised Land. The Passover Lamb and the unleavened bread, more pointedly refer to the one who is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. All these foreshadows and prototypes find their culmination in the Passover of the Lord. At the Last Supper, “Christ transformed the Passover feast into the Sacrifice of his own Body and Blood for the salvation of humanity. In this Passover of the Lord, Christ himself is the Paschal Lamb who is sacrificed. It is in this context that Christ the Lord instituted the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Holy Orders”(CCC 1151, 1339-13400). The Passover will find its final fulfilment in heaven. Hence, the Mass is a reflection of the heavenly liturgy. This means that the Holy Mass is a heaven on earth. Our religion incorporates “wonder, mystery, beauty, artistry, freedom, obedience, gratitude, humility, dramatic sacrifice and gigantic joy” (Dale Ahlquist, G. K Chesterton, *The Apostle of Common Sense*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003, p.23).

The Holy Eucharist embodies all these and it is a sacrament of unity. “So when we as one are gathered all together, let us strive to keep our minds, free of division, may there be an end to malice, strife and quarrels and let Christ our God be dwelling here among us” (Ubi Caritas).

St Thomas Aquinas wrote,

When the Only Begotten Son of God took our flesh he dedicated the whole of its substance to our salvation. He offered his body to God the Father on the altar of the cross as a sacrifice for our reconciliation. He shed his blood for our ransom and purification, so that we might be redeemed from our wretched state of bondage and cleansed from all sin. But to ensure that the memory of so great a gift would abide with us for ever, he left his body as food and his blood as drink for the faithful to consume in the form of bread and wine (Office of the Readings, Feast of Corpus Christi)..

Speaking further on the awesomeness of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the angelic doctor remarked,

None is greater than this: O precious and wonderful banquet, that brings us salvation and contains all sweetness! Could anything be of more intrinsic value? Under the old law it was the flesh of calves and goats that was offered, but here Christ himself, the true God, is set before us as our food. What could be more wonderful than this? No other sacrament has greater healing power; through it sins are purged away, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift (O Precious and Wonderful Banquet, Office of the Readings, Feast of Corpus Christi).

How shall we prepare ourselves to receive the Most Holy Body and Blood of the Lord?

To respond to this invitation we must *prepare ourselves* for so great and so holy a moment. St. Paul urges us to examine our conscience, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Corinthians 11:27). "Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion (CCC 1385).

Who receives? No one is holy enough to receive the Lord in the Eucharist but the minimum he asks of us is that we be in a state of grace and in communion with His Church. The Protestantism does not uphold the communion with the Apostolic Church and does not believe in transubstantiation, that is, the change of substances of the bread and wine into the substances of body and blood of Christ after the prayer of consecration. Since the protestants do not share this belief, then they of their own accord deprive themselves of receiving the most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. On this point, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states,

Ecclesial communities derived from the Reformation and separated from the Catholic Church, "have not preserved the proper reality of the Eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Holy Orders." It is for this reason that, for the Catholic Church, Eucharistic intercommunion with these communities is not possible. (CCC 1400).