

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (06.06.2021)

Ex 24:3-8

Ps 116

Heb 9:11-15

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

After our celebration of the great season of Easter, concluding with the beautiful feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost, and following our celebration of the divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity last weekend, holy Church places before us this week the mystery of our Lord's Body and Blood, truly present in the most holy Eucharist. The Eucharist stands at the centre of the Church's life, since it truly contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth – Christ Jesus himself, our Passover and living bread. The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ our Lord, not as one gift among many others, but as *the* gift par excellence – for it is the gift of himself: of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work. Therefore, it's of the utmost importance that we show the greatest of respect to—and reverence for—Our Lord truly present in the holy Eucharist, such as we are encouraged to do today.

Following the 9:30am Mass we will be taking part in something that Catholics have been doing for centuries – publicly proclaiming our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the holy Eucharist by processing with the Blessed Sacrament outside our church. It's a beautiful way of expressing our devotion to Christ, and of worshipping his real presence among us.

I've got a little story about a Eucharistic Procession I got to take part in one time. In my homiletics class in Rome they always advised us not to tell too many stories in our homilies starting with, "When I was in Rome..." However, I think this one's worth it.

In the small Italian town of Bolsena (a couple hours north of Rome), a Eucharistic miracle took place in the 13th century. It's said that a visiting priest was having a crisis of faith about whether or not Christ was truly present in the Eucharist, and during his Mass one day the host starting bleeding. Afterwards they took the blood-stained corporal (the uppermost cloth on the altar) and showed it to Pope Urban IV, who happened to be visiting the nearby town of Orvieto, and it's said that this miracle was part of what convinced him to make Corpus Christi a feast for the universal Church.

And so every year on the feast of Corpus Christi—starting in Orvieto and then moving to Bolsena—there's the most remarkable procession of both the Blessed Sacrament and the blood-stained corporal from this 13th-century miracle. And I got to take part in it one time on what happened to be the 750th anniversary of the miracle. It was a long and tiring day, but it was certainly worth it.

All along the ground along the path of the procession are the most gorgeous artworks made from nothing but coloured rose-petals – images of the Blessed Sacrament, or images from our Lord’s life, or images of the Blessed Mother or another saint. And these rose-petal artworks serve as a kind of red carpet for the Eucharistic Procession. I must say it felt a bit weird to be walking all over these marvellous artistic creations, but of course they weren’t for us – they were there in honour of our Lord, who would be passing by in the Sacred Host.

The grandeur of such celebrations speak to the magnitude of the gift we celebrate in the Eucharist. But of course it’s not just a gift we receive on occasions such as today’s feast, but at every Mass.

Some of you have heard me say this before, but in one sense the Eucharist is a bit like a good joke – not in the sense that it’s laughable, but in the sense that once you get it, you can’t un-get it. Deep down, those of us who really *get* the Eucharist, know that we could never do without it. And I think this is one of the reasons why, for all the mess in our Church at times, Catholic Mass attendance across the Western world really hasn’t dropped off nearly as much compared with how many other Christian denominations have fared in the last 20-30 years. Because a lot of us just can’t live without the Eucharist.

Most of probably only scratch the surface of its significance, but we know in our core that every time the Eucharist is celebrated, something profoundly divine and other-worldly breaks through into our time and place. There’s a tearing of the veil dividing heaven and earth.

This is what the Real Presence of Christ really means. Yes, there’s certainly a place for theological reflection about Transubstantiation and what’s really going on in the minutia of the Mass. But at the end of the day, what the Real Presence ultimately means is that the full reality of the risen Christ has become truly present to us – that the next world has broken into this one—seamlessly—and yet in a way that also turns life-as-usual upside-down. It’s a truly amazing thing – which is why the Church asks us to do things like genuflect before the tabernacle, and to celebrate Mass with a seriousness and a dignity that befits the significance of what is truly taking place. Because these actions of our part are not only a way of honouring our Lord, but they also serve to bolster our faith.

Let me finish with a brief story about this from the life of Dorothy Day, a fascinating 20th century American Catholic who started the Catholic Worker movement and whose cause for sainthood is currently underway.

During the 1970s, as some of you know, a number of priests were becoming rather casual with the liturgy. One afternoon, a priest came into the soup kitchen that Dorothy Day was working at. He wanted to offer a Mass for the homeless, and he saw nothing wrong with going into the kitchen and grabbed a mug to use for the chalice.

Dorothy, although frustrated at the irreverent use of houseware for the liturgy, prayed throughout the Mass with the priest. After the liturgy ended, she quietly got up and started to cleanse the vessels. Then, she walked outside with the mug and a shovel.

A man followed her to ask her what she was doing, and he saw her kiss the mug and then buried it. She told him that it was no longer a mug, but a chalice. It was no longer suitable for coffee – it had held the Blood of Christ. She didn't want anyone to mistake it for a mug again. Once something holds the Body of Christ, it is no longer what it was. When the mug held the Blood of Christ, it changed its vocation forever. It could no longer hold anything less than Christ again.

And this is where we come in. You and I were also common mugs, so to speak. Simple, functional, practical, and good people. We had a capacity to hold good things. But when Christ entered our lives—as he did in our first Communion—we became more. We became Chalices. We started to hold divinity Himself within our hearts. Now that we have held the Body of Christ within our bodies, we are no longer common, but instead, we have become extraordinary. We have become temples of the Lord.

Our participation in the Eucharist means that the transformation God works upon the bread and wine he also works within us. Just as the simple bread and wine is transformed into Christ – so we who receive are transformed into Christ. In the miracle of the Mass, we become what we eat. God makes his home among us – within our very bodies.

It's the most extraordinary thing. And this is why we honour the holy Eucharist in such a profound way – because if we're able to recognise Christ present in the host, then we can also recognise him present in ourselves, and in our brothers and sisters in the Lord. God himself comes down upon this altar, and—through the Eucharist—God himself enters into our bodies and souls.

Praised be Jesus Christ – now and forever.