

Homily Corpus Christi 2023

Today, the second Sunday after Pentecost, we celebrate the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ or "Corpus Christi." It originated in France in the mid-thirteenth century and was extended to the whole Church by Pope Urban IV in 1264. This feast celebrates Christ's gift of the Eucharist to the People of God.

In today's gospel, Christ teaches: "I am the living bread. The bread that I shall give is my flesh...if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you." It was on account of this truth that some of his disciples deserted him thinking: "This saying is hard...!" (Jn. 6:61).

A study a few years ago about the level of Catholic belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist showed that a majority of Catholics do not believe that the bread and wine used at Mass become the body and blood of Christ.

The Pew study, issued Aug. 5, 2019, showed that 69% of all self-identified Catholics said they believed the bread and wine used at Mass are not Jesus, but instead "symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ." The other 31% believed in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, known as transubstantiation.

The NCR (National Catholic Reporter) reported that Bishop Robert Barron was astounded by the findings. "Any Catholic worth his or her salt knows this is a central teaching," he said. "It's a basic tenet of Catholicism."

As a teenager I found myself wondering how it was possible that this teaching is true. At one point I realized the truth taught into today's Scripture. I just believed. I think a helpful way to reflect on this teaching of the Church is to consider what else God has done that as recorded in the Word of God.

Remember what God has done:

- Mary conceives Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus turns water into wine.
- Jesus brought Lazarus back to life.
- Jesus feeds the five thousand.
- Jesus heals many people.

Today's teaching about the Eucharist reminds us that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, food for the spiritual journey. You may have heard the sayings: "You are what you eat" and "good food nourishes the body." The physical food we eat nourishes the body, spiritual food nourishes our soul, prepares, and preserves it for eternity. The Eucharist, as the body and blood of Christ, not only makes the soul fit to dwell in a healthy body but also gives us the strength and grace to fulfill the mission Christ has given to His Church.

The Eucharist sustains our spiritual life, while our human food and the Manna that the Israelites eat sustain our physical and mortal life. It gives us the grace to feel forgiven and to be ready to forgive others. We go to Mass not because we are worthy. Instead, these come through the Eucharist because we always need God's love and mercy.

Today's Feast, like the many stories about the life of Jesus, also reminds us that all things are possible with God. May the Body and Blood of Christ strengthen our belief in God's faithfulness to His people, especially to each of us, His beloved.