

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This weekend we celebrate the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* – the Body and Blood of Christ. Today we celebrate in a special way our firm and consistent belief that the Eucharist is *truly* the Body and Blood of Christ; not a mere symbol or ritual meal, but the presence of God! It is His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. This should give us pause. The Eucharist is not a ‘re-sacrificing’ of Christ, but the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ are brought from 2000 years ago into the eternity of Heaven, and from that eternity to us on the Altar every time we celebrate Mass. It is not a dead body that we eat, but the living, glorified Body of Christ. As Bl. Paul VI said, that in the Eucharist is Christ present as He is in Heaven, without ever leaving heaven. Should we truly believe this, should we remember this when we approach the Altar to receive Communion, we would come with great reverence and awe at the Gift of God before us. It should also make us wonder at our own dignity – that God would choose to feed us with His very Body and Blood, that nothing will satisfy the infinite ache, the infinite hunger and longing within each of us except GOD! We might wonder why God would choose to do this – to feed us with His Body and Blood. *God is a lover*. The whole of our Faith can be summarized as a **longing for nuptial union** – we long for intimacy. This longing ultimately is for God. As I have said, the summary of the Bible is that “God wants to marry us!” I don’t say this lightly or as simply a nice saying, but as a firm truth to ponder!

In the beginning when God created Adam, He knew that He must make a helpmate for him. The animals were not sufficient partners – they were not his equal. So God put Adam into a *deep sleep*, opened his *side*, took a rib and created woman (Eve). “**That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh**” (Gen 2:24). Jesus is the New Adam (I Cor 15:45) and His Bride is the Church (cf. Eph 5:25-32). In the *sleep* of death, Christ’s *side* is opened with a lance, and Blood and Water flow out (John 19:34) – the wellspring of Baptism and the Eucharist – and from His side, His Bride, the Church, is born. When Jesus goes to the Cross, the Fathers of the Church tell us, He mounts the *marriage bed of the Cross*; He does not mount it in pleasure, but in pain. He says, “This is My Body given up for you.” He is the Bridegroom giving His life for His Bride. And we know that this nuptial act is fruitful for from it we hear, “Woman, behold your son... behold your mother” (John 19:26-27).

The Eucharist, which is the Presence of the *Paschal Mystery* (suffering, death, resurrection, ascension of Christ), then is the marriage act between Christ and the Church – between God and us, here and now today. It is not, I want to emphasize, a sexual act but a *more intimate union* between God and humanity. Just as the sexual act can be the highest way of showing love between two people, so it can also be the greatest violation. So with receiving the Eucharist – it can be the greatest way of intimacy and union with Christ (as I tell the first Communicants – God snuggles into their hearts and souls), but the desecration and sacrilege of the Eucharist is the greatest violation of the relationship with God.

What does this mean for us practically? When we go to Adore our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, we spend time with our lover, our Divine Spouse. Time with Him in His Presence transforms us as the sun changes our skin on a sunny day. We need to prepare ourselves to receive Him in the Eucharist so that we can give ourselves fully to Him, holding nothing back, and receive Him in His wholeness. Imagine what Mass would be like if we came to it as to meet a lover! Imagine what our Communion would be like if we approached the Altar with great hunger, ready to be filled by the Almighty! Imagine how fruitful our prayer would be if we truly believed that He is present before us and hears every prayer. No one could ever say “Mass is boring” ... even if the homilist were terrible, the music *blah*, and the servers clumsy.

The Eucharist, which is the very Presence of Christ, is the source and summit of our Faith. It *is* Christ, his very essence, present so humbly before us so that we would not fear to approach Him. This is *mercy*, that He would humble Himself so much, so that we could truly come to Him and receive Him into ourselves.

The *matter* of the Eucharist is wheat bread and grape wine. This is why we can’t have Mass with pizza and beer. This is also why we cannot have a gluten-free host – without wheat, it is not consecrated, it does not become the Body of Christ (we do have low-gluten hosts for those who are sensitive to wheat). The *form* for the Sacrament is the epiclesis – the invocation of the Holy Spirit, when the priest extends his hands over the bread and wine (as I tell the servers, when I have “superman” hands, and the bells ring the first time) – and the words of the Consecration (“this is my body... this is the chalice of my blood”). With these words, God becomes present in our midst!