

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

St. John 6:51-58

We celebrate today the great solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. It is a solemnity where we honour, in a particular way, the real presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament—the “Sacrament of Sacraments”.

When we say that Christ is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, it does not deny that God is present in other ways in the world. God is present in all places and at all times. But God, having created us as natural beings knows that we need natural things to tie us to the supernatural. We are body and soul, our bodies give expression to our souls and by physical means we give expression to the spiritual. So God gave us the Blessed Sacrament—the Body, the Blood, the Soul, the Divinity of Christ Himself under what seems like bread and wine, so that we can point to the Host and to the chalice and say, “here is God Himself.”

What we receive in Holy Communion is absolutely and without reservation truly the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Although we use what are called the species of bread and wine, as Our Lord commanded us to do, the fact is that by the words of the Priest in the Eucharistic prayer, the Holy Spirit descends to this very altar and transforms natural bread and wine into the supernatural Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ Himself. The bread and the wine no longer exist. All that we can say is that the accidents—that is, the taste and smell and texture—of the bread and wine remain, but that is because God, in his great wisdom, made it possible for us to receive the flesh and blood of Christ in a way that we could eat and drink.

To deny this truth of the faith, to deny that the bread and wine become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ is to deny that God Himself is capable of doing such a thing. It is to deny that the God who we believe made the world and all that lives and breathes, who holds the power of life and death, who can create out of nothing and remove from existence anything that is, cannot change bread and wine into His Body and Blood.

Of all the miracles Christ performed, the miracle of the Eucharist is the greatest of them all. To believe in this miracle, which takes place on every altar at every Mass in every Catholic church in the world is a matter of faith. We believe this because we are Catholic, and we are Catholic because we believe this. To refuse to believe in this, to say that it is only a sign or a symbol, that it is only a remembrance of a meal, is to separate ourselves from Christ.

When Our Lord first taught this doctrine of His Body and Blood, which we read in the gospel of St. John, chapter six, He said: "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" (*Jn. 6:55*). But to this teaching, St. John adds that, "After hearing it, many of his followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?... [And] after this, many of his disciples went away and accompanied him no more" (*Jn. 6:60, 66*). These few words are critical to our understanding of the Blessed Sacrament and, even more so, to the teachings of the Church. As St. John said, those who claimed to be Christ's disciples were appalled by His teaching and so refused to believe and abandoned Him. But what did Christ do? Did he chase after them, saying that He'll change His teaching so that it is more appealing to them, or something that would be more popular, or something that would convince them to stay? No, He didn't. He let them go. He let them go because the truth of what He said was the truth of salvation. As St. Peter said to Christ when He asked him, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" (*Jn. 6:67*), St. Peter simply says: "to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life" (*Jn. 6:68*).

Salvation is not always pretty, and it certainly isn't always popular. Salvation is a matter, quite literally, of life and death. There is no other choice. But we, because we are made in the image and likeness of God, have been created with free will, and free will gives us the right to think what we like, but it in no way means that our thinking is right. St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians said, "True, everything is permissible, but not everything builds people up" (I Cor. 10:23).

We all, each and every one of us, are obligated to God Himself to ensure that we only ever receive Holy Communion in a state of grace. We owe it to God, and to the hope for our salvation, to ensure that our souls are places fit and worthy to receive He who created that very same soul. In the sequence which we have just heard, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: "The good, the guilty share therein, with sure increase of grace or sin, the ghostly life, or ghostly death: death to the guilty; to the good immortal life. See how one food Man's joy or woe accomplisheth." When St. Thomas wrote this he was drawing on the teaching of St. Paul who said: "Therefore anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone is to examine himself and only then eat of the bread or drink from the cup; because a person who eats and drinks without recognising the body is eating and drinking his own condemnation" (I Cor. 11:27-29).

It is said that the angels themselves are jealous of us because they cannot receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord. That they, even though are forever in the presence of God Himself, and though they have no need of receiving the Sacrament as we do, cannot receive God Himself as we can. And so we all have, every one of us, a solemn and sacred duty to protect and to guard the Blessed Sacrament from all profanity and disrespect. And to have this duty is a privilege, because God has given to us to care for Him just as the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph cared for him. It is why we, each and everyone one of us, must be sure that Holy Communion is received worthily and respectfully. We

never walk away from the altar carrying the Host but consume it immediately and whilst we are facing the altar. Because it is from the altar itself that we receive the Host and so it is towards the altar that we face to consume the Host. We are receiving Christ, the victim of the sacrifice, and so we should face Him on the altar on which He was sacrificed.

It is difficult to understand how bread and wine can become truly the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ so that, in spite of what we see, the bread and wine are no longer there at all. But it is an act of faith, and just as Christ gave Himself over completely to the will of His Father in the garden of Gethsemane, so we give ourselves wholly over to the faith asked of us by Christ. Because it is a matter of trust; that what God has said is, truly is. So profound is this truth that we are beholden—it is our duty—to honour and revere, body and soul, this Most Blessed Sacrament from which pours forth grace upon grace.

The Blessed Sacrament, as so many truths of our faith, has been abused and abandoned for the sake of the pride of humanity. The world has lost sight of what is greater, what lies beyond, and has chosen the things of this world and forsaken the world that is to come. The Blessed Sacrament itself is the victim of so much abuse, so much outrage, so much profanity. Many Catholics now no longer believe that the Blessed Sacrament is truly the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, they say it is only a symbol or a sign but it is not the reality. What Our Lord has given to us, they have thrown away.

Many people long for a closer union with Our Lord, so we must go to where He is. We find Him in our churches, in His real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. In a world where not many people know Our Lord intimately, this Year of the Blessed Sacrament is meant to show everyone what wonders the True Presence of Jesus can do to heal the soul. It is a time to confront the hardships that face people in everyday life and to return to He who is our anchor amongst the storms and the port in which we find our safe harbour.

The Council of Trent declared that “in the sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist is contained truly, really, and substantially the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ”. If we truly understand this, if we truly believe this, we will realise that we are bearing Christ in our own body, just as the Blessed Virgin Mary did when she carried her Son—just as if we ourselves are a human tabernacle.

Let us pray then, that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, who carried the Body and Blood of her Son in her womb, may intercede for us so that we may be granted the grace to behold the truth and beauty of this most precious Sacrament of the Eucharist—this Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

After Our Lord’s resurrection and before His ascension into Heaven, He gathered the Apostles to Him on a mountain top and said to them: “And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Mt 28:20). In the Blessed Sacrament, we have the fulfillment of that promise Our Lord made two thousand years ago—that He is with us, always.