

Homily

Corpus Christi – A

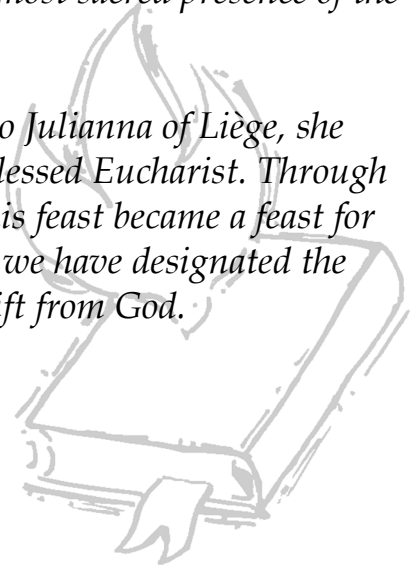
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
June 13-14, 2020

Dt 8: 2-3, 14-16
Ps 147: 12-13, 14-15, 19-20
1 Cor 10: 16-17
Jn 6: 51-58

Intro at beginning at Mass: On Sept 8, 1264, Pope Urban IV designated this special feast day as “Corpus Christi” or “The Body and Blood of Christ.” In reality, we celebrate this feast on Holy Thursday, the day where we remember how this Mass was first introduced to us by the Lord. However, because Holy Thursday fell into Holy Week, Pope Urban felt that this particular feast could easily get lost in the significance of the Paschal Mystery. Thus in 1264, Pope Urban designated this particular day as one to honor the great gift that is given to us from the altar before us.

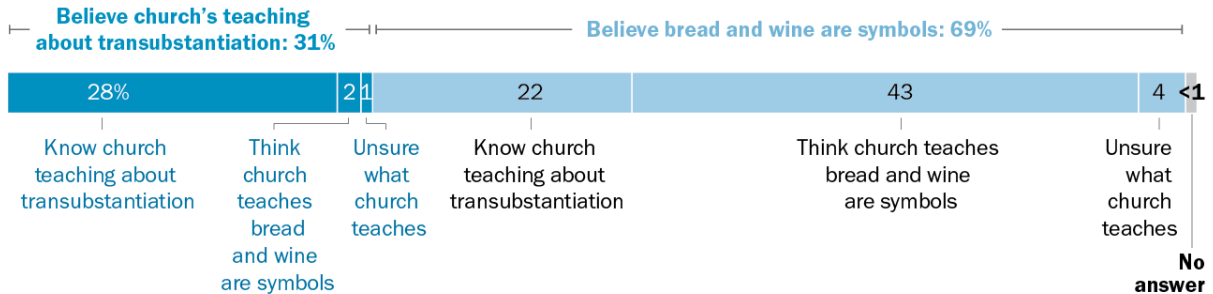
I have learned that over the centuries, some cultures have made great ritual in giving honor to this presence of Christ in the Eucharist, while others have not done so much. There have been people over the centuries that have also demeaned the importance of the Eucharist, forgetting about how that presence of Christ is the only pathway we know to reach heaven. We learn that about 900 years ago, a man named Berengarius of Tours believed that this Eucharist was not really the real presence of Christ but a mere symbol of something more sacred. When the Church heard of such words it went ballistic and ordered the man to write a retraction. The Church stated that the Eucharist is not a symbol of Christ but Christ himself, body and soul. We learn that the gift we hold in our hands is the most sacred presence of the Lord in our midst.

Two hundred years later, through a vision given to Julianna of Liège, she implored the Church to designate a feast for this blessed Eucharist. Through the help of Pope John XXII and later Urban IV, this feast became a feast for the universal Church. And for the past 700 years, we have designated the Sunday after Trinity Sunday as the feast of this gift from God.



Seven-in-ten U.S. Catholics believe bread, wine used in Communion are symbolic

% of U.S. Catholics who ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.
 Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-19, 2019, among U.S. adults.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Back in my high school seminary days (there actually were high school seminaries at the time) in Madison, Wisconsin, I attended one Holy Name High School Seminary from 1979 to 1983 (I believe the seminary closed in 1995, one year prior to my priestly ordination). Per the encouragement of my hometown pastor Fr. Thomas Kane, I went to High School Seminary as a preparation stage for me to determine what I wanted to do in life.

Towards that pursuit, I have found that the best way for me as a Christian and as a priest to live out my life and vocation was not with the higher ups and the fancy things of life but rather those who live the simple ways of the Christian faith (I still believe that the pulse of local

parish faith life can be found most visibly in the parish secretary, housekeeper and maintenance personnel).

From seminary forward, I have found the life of faith extremely visible with the people who do the behind the scenes work in life, the people who express their faith in the smallest of ways whom, to be, I believe God views as those who truly are blessed. As we constantly read in scriptures (most notably in Matthew 25), to serve and be like the least is to be like Christ; the least in the kingdom of God are the ones that God raises the highest.

That said, I did spend a lot of time in my high school seminary days with the maintenance personnel and with the cleaning people and with the sisters who worked in the cafeteria cooking meals for us who lived and studied in high school. I came to find that these sisters were so filled with God's spirit and were so holy that I learned the greatest lessons about the faith through their example (which is why I spent so much time in the kitchens during my fourteen years of seminary life). I honestly believe that if I could live like them and serve with the same

kind of humility that they have, that the Poor Clares have that I serve in this diocese, that I am well on my way to the kingdom of heaven.

Knowing in my heart that I have long ways to go to be as humble as the religious sisters I have encountered in life... I honestly say with all sincerity that the sisters with whom I worked in the high school seminary kitchen were the kindest hearts I had experienced but (God help me) *they were some of the worst cooks I had ever encountered in my life.* The sisters' specialty of the house was - *gasp* - fried bologna chunks. If you ever tasted a fried bologna chunk, you would understand why this was not high cuisine of Wolfgang Puck that we were consuming during high school. The deep fryer seemed to be the cooking device of their choice. In my recollection of their cooking style, they would dip everything into a batter and throw it into hot oil. But everything they did began and ended with prayer, and the sisters dedicated their lives to the well-being of every person they served.

I also came to learn the hard way that the sisters fried some of the most disgusting and bland fried chicken that I ever tasted in my life. IN

fact, after high school seminary I had sworn off fried chicken until someone forced me to consume the fast food variety; I resigned myself to the fact that any type of chicken for a great deal of my life was not very amenable to my taste palate.

Concerning their fried chicken, I was always interested in the way they prepared this meal, since the coating they used on the chicken resembled that of corn flakes but without any flavor whatsoever. Being that I could not figure out what kind of coating they were using, I asked the sisters one day what the secret was to make their version of fried chicken. The sisters replied to me that they received this secret coating, free of charge, from the Poor Clare Monastery from the southern end of the diocese.

If these Poor Claire Sisters in Wisconsin had the same type of spirituality as the ones I serve in Minooka, then they must be an extremely special, holy group of nuns. That said, the Poor Clare Sisters from Wisconsin were responsible for the special bland coating that they provided for the seminary kitchen nuns, free of charge.

As I came to find out, the Poor Clares in Southern Wisconsin dedicate themselves to making altar breads for the surrounding parishes that place their orders with them. The bread is made from a simple batter of flour and water that is poured into a baking sheet and baked with simple designs. When the cooked sheet is cool enough to handle, the sisters punch out the hosts from the sheet and crumble the leftovers from the sheet. The sisters would take some of those crumbled remains from the baked product and ship to my high school seminary so that our sisters could use them as the coating for the fried chicken.

As a result, what I ate in high school seminary was some of the blandest, most disgusting fried chicken I have ever eaten in my life because communion hosts are made from just flour and water. Communion hosts have no seasoning; there is no flavor. Communion hosts are bland; they are not appetizing. To coat fried chicken with this crushed substance was offensive to the taste buds, the same type of substance we use to consecrate for our Church Masses.

In the world of faith, though, the symbolism behind this simple flour and water recipe makes the feast of Corpus Christi that much more special in my own prayer life. Without adding anything to the flour and water, the bread sustains life, but not much else. I cannot help but think about our Old Testament brethren who wandered 40 years in the wilderness during the great Exodus from the Old Testament. I thought about how these men and women ate this type of bland food for 40 years, each and every day, a food which provided nourishment and strength for the journey, though in the eyes of the faithful, the food offered nothing more – the chosen people complained that the food was bland and their hope was low. The manna recalled the Exodus from Egypt, a flight that happened in such haste that those baking bread had no time to allow their own bread to rise. And like that great Exodus, the manna the chosen people ate did not have any flavor or texture. Without anything more within the bread, the bread itself became a simple function of living, but nothing more. (Mind you, the bread had a great symbolic effect of God's presence within a people who were led by

the Lord out of slavery, but like a rich person who has everything but seeks more, the chosen men and women from the Old Testament wanted more, even though they had more than enough in their midst).

The bread we offer at the Presentation of the Gifts at Mass evokes the same themes as those of the Old Testament. A simple combination of flour and water, the bread that we offer seems lacking taste and flavor. Without something added or changed to the recipe, the bread that we offer provides nothing more than nourishment to the body.

The beauty of this feast of Corpus Christi is that this bread will become different than any other bread we encounter in life. The key ingredient in this recipe is the presence of the Holy Spirit which changes the bread into something different, into the most sacred thing that exists in this world. When the Holy Spirit changes this bread, in appearance it looks like simple flour and water, but the form is changed into the Precious Body of our Lord, a presence that is neither bland nor simple.

Though a mystery never can be described adequately, what changes is the reality of that substance and the reality of the lives who receive it.

Those who receive this gift no longer look at this changed Real Presence of Christ simply as a means by which the body is nourished but the soul as well. How many times in the scriptures has our Lord instructed the faithful concerning the spiritual gifts rendered through the reception of this gift? Jesus tells us in today's famous "Bread of Life" passage from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

And because of this change, the people who receive this bread are changed as well. The baptized who receive this presence of God alter their lives to model the presence they have received. Married couples become strengthened by this presence so that this presence may shine within their union and within their families. Those who live the gospel are strengthened to go out and preach the gospel, aided by that divine love in their hearts. And religious men and women who receive this gift become motivated to set the example of love, sometimes through the

image of bad fried chicken to the people they encounter. It is through that example of love that the world sees the light of Christ shining brightly within the individual. It is through the presence of Christ that others are drawn to this table so that they may share this banquet with us.

In the reality of our daily parish life, though, this changed communion host causes problems for those who do not understand the power of what we receive. Even though we receive this gift, so many do not realize that this changed host truly is the source and summit of our Christian life. In our gospel today, this “Bread of Life” sermon from the sixth chapter of the gospel of John, causes great difficulties for those who came to follow Jesus. As we read in this passage, Jesus begins the sixth chapter by feeding the multitudes by giving them food to sustain their bodies.

As we read in this story, those who were fed wish to make Jesus a king and they want to follow him. These people wish to follow Jesus and pursue him across a body of water but when they reach him for

more food, Jesus explains to them that his purpose on earth was not to feed their bodies but to save their souls. If we understand the purpose in that story and the purpose in our lives to do the same – *to save souls* (starting with our own) – then we are truly prepared for what is left to come.

If we are only concerned about making it to the “Second Day” instead of trying to avoid the “Second Death,” then we are missing the point of our existence. If our lives are taken right now (as in *today*), it does not matter – as long as we are prepared, as long as we have shown God that we really are truly and completely wanting to follow him and receive this gift that he offers us on this altar, then we are ready to go to heaven. *This* is the purpose of our existence.

We have come to find that this time on earth is our time to show God that we are truly prepared. As Jesus tells us in the gospel of Luke (22: 18-20) and St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians (11: 23-25), Jesus offers us this meal and commissions us to offer this perpetual meal as a *memorial*, as a *sacrifice* that starts on this altar and was completed on this cross.

Jesus passed on this mission to his apostles, as they did to the bishops (their successors) and the bishops passed through priests like me. My vocation allowed the Holy Spirit to work through my hands so that God could work through me to change these gifts of bread and wine into Jesus' body and blood.

As I offer on the video presentation following my online Mass, what we see on this altar may look the same as flour and water mixed together and put into an oven – this appearance or “accident” looks the same after it has changed but its substance is completely different. If we understand that, then we understand why it is so important that we attend this Mass every Sunday, listen to the word, receive the sacrament and be strengthened by God in the process so that the Christian can return to a world that lives a completely different lifestyle often devoid of the presence of the divine.

We get so worried about the trivial things of life that we forget about our true purpose and reflect that purpose accordingly. For this reason, we celebrate this Mass today and you are attending one of our outdoor

or online Masses. Let us realize that God does give us a purpose; God gives us a gift to be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word and certainly by the sacrament we are about to receive. Let us never take this gift, this gift of grace, this gift of God's presence in our life. Let us be strengthened by this gift as we minister to the people that we meet. This is our prayer.