

Fr. John's Homily for June 11, 2023, Corpus Christi
JMJ CHS

The Church has provided us with this solemn feast day to help us reflect upon what has been called the Source and Summit of our Faith. It's the breaking of the bread; it's Holy Communion; it's the Eucharist, the belief that Jesus is here among us in the bread and wine consecrated by the priest within the Mass. We call it the Real Presence. It has the technical name of Transubstantiation, but simply put, we believe that the bread and wine become Jesus. And this year, beginning today, Corpus Christi Sunday, we are going to try to do what we can to come to an ever better understanding of this great mystery of the body and blood of Christ.

A few weeks ago I mentioned in one of my homilies that the bishops are concerned that fewer and fewer Catholics are believing in this important truth. I truly don't believe it's the case here at Holy Spirit. Deacon, Jerry and I have preached about it many times and so you guys are too well informed and faithful to have any doubts. But who knows, maybe there are a few people who are unsure, on the fence or for that matter, may have even lost their faith in the Eucharist. Well, if that it is the case, then this one's for you. We're going back to the basics over the course of this year and do what we can to participate in a Eucharistic Revival. And the highlight will be a Eucharistic Congress held in Indianapolis next year. Maybe some of you will go.

So let's begin our year-long journey. Again, it's our firm belief that Jesus is present body, blood, soul and divinity in unleavened bread and in wine. We believe that these simple elements of food and drink are changed into something new. It happens through the intention of a duly ordained priest who speaks the prescribed words of consecration - words that come from the Gospels - and calls down the Holy Spirit by extending his hands over those two elements. And again, this happens within the context of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And the altar servers ring the bells to call our attention to this all important moment.

This ritual of Consecration was established at the Last Supper. Jesus, at the end of His earthly life, provides a means for us to remain in relationship. And what better way to do it than to be food for us. Spiritual food. The food that nourishes not our bodies, but our spirits. And we believe this because the Bible tells us so. More specifically because Jesus told us so. He says, "Take and eat. This is my body. Take and drink, This is my blood." Then finally, the climactic words of the consecration; "Do this." He said, "Do this in memory of me." Can we call it the greatest command ever given? If so, the Church has obeyed it for close to 2000 years now in every corner of the world and in every possible circumstance. By one priest, saying Mass by himself in his rectory, as I do on most Mondays, or in a concentration camp, or with hundreds of thousands, maybe even over a million faithful at one time like at Fatima, or at a World Youth Day.

We all love to eat and drink, and, in most cases, it's good for us unless, of course, your glucose levels are off. Then you have to be a little bit careful. But, guess what? You also may have to be careful with spiritual food. On a spiritual level and a physical level.

On the spiritual level, you have to receive without sin on your soul (that will be a subject for down the road). But physically speaking, it's strange, I know, but some people are allergic to wheat and so we have to make accommodations. Gluten free hosts. And there is also a problem with the wine. Some people are allergic to alcohol. And once again, the Church makes accommodations, particularly for the priests who are called upon to consume both bread and wine at the consecration. Those of you in the pews can simply avoid drinking of the Precious Blood if it is deemed prudent to not partake.

Now, if perchance, there are some of you out here who are a bit confused and not quite sure about this Eucharist stuff, you can be assured that this is nothing new. It is a revolutionary teaching and it has been controversial from the beginning. Consider John's reading today from the famous Chapter 6. The Jews quarreled among themselves when Jesus said the controversial words. And it would get worse when many would leave Him that day. But even priests have struggled along the way, not entirely sure if they could believe what they are called upon to do, and then to confidently proclaim that truth to their congregations.

There will be many elements of the Eucharist that we will talk about over the next year. But let me start with one topic, and that is Eucharistic miracles. Jesus provided many throughout the years and the first one was probably the most important and most famous. It is from Lanciano, Italy in about the year 700. A local priest did have his doubts right there on the altar. And so the Lord changed the host and made the invisible realities, visible. The host became what appeared to be flesh. Ultimately, it was closely examined by scientists and it was, indeed, determined to be flesh, from a heart, with a particular blood type. It is preserved through this day in a relic right there in the Italian town and it is one of the places that many tourists visit every year. In the recent Faith magazine article about the Eucharist, we had the story of the local Eucharistic miracle of an image of Jesus appearing on the consecrated host as displayed in the monstrance in the School chapel. Many people witnessed that "miracle".

In the coming year our Bishop will also have something to say. He has begun to advertise his program called On The Road to Emmaus. The reference, of course, is to that famous moment where Jesus approaches the two broken-hearted disciples walking on the road on the day of His Resurrection. That evening He would reveal himself to them ... in the breaking of the bread. You will find these cards at the back of the Church which explain how you can receive his weekly communications about our subject matter.

So, for all of you here, and maybe even myself, we all hope to learn something more about the great gift of Jesus' presence among us. Maybe it will change us on some fundamental level. Maybe it will take us back to our earlier days when there was much more reverence in the way we Catholics conduct ourselves in our churches, and even out in the world.

~Fr. John