

Trinity 1/Corpus Christi 2017 – Resurrection, Ansonia

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today is the First Sunday after Trinity in the Octave of Corpus Christi. The proper and complete title for Corpus Christi is The Commemoration of the Most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, commonly called Corpus Christi. This feast is a liturgical solemnity celebrating the real presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. It is the centrality of the Eucharist in our liturgy that marks the great chasm between the Catholic and Protestant forms of worship. The center of Protestant worship is scripture and the Sermon is at the end of the service as the climax of the worship. In Catholic churches, Roman, Anglican, and Eastern, the central focus is the Eucharist which comes at the end as the ultimate expression of worship.

The institution of Corpus Christi as a feast in the Christian calendar resulted from approximately forty years of work on the part of St. Juliana of Liège, a 13th-century Norbertine canoness, also known as Juliana de Cornillon, born in 1191 or 1192 in Liège, Belgium, a city where there were groups of women dedicated to Eucharistic worship. Guided by exemplary priests, they lived together, devoted to prayer and to charitable works. Orphaned at the age of five, she and her sister Agnes were entrusted to the care of the Augustinian nuns at the convent and leprosarium of Mont-Cornillon, where Juliana developed a special veneration for the Blessed Sacrament.

By tradition, Catholics on Corpus Christi take part in a procession following mass, through the streets of a neighborhood near their parish, and pray and sing during the passage. The Blessed Sacrament, is placed in a monstrance and is held aloft by a

member of the clergy during the procession. After the procession, parishioners return to the church, where benediction usually takes place.

In the Protestant denominations, there is no belief in the real presence of Christ in the communion and “communion” is celebrated only as a commemoration of the Last Supper, and that as infrequently as possible. In many Congregational Churches, it is only celebrated once every quarter and is celebrated almost as an afterthought.

Indeed, Martin Luther referred to the Feast of Corpus Christi in the most negative of terms. He wrote. “I am to no festival more hostile ... than this one. Because it is the most shameful festival. At no festival are God and his Christ more blasphemed, than on this day, and particularly by the procession. For then people are treating the Blessed Sacrament with such ignominy that it becomes only play-acting and is just vain idolatry. With its cosmetics and false holiness, it conflicts with Christ's order and establishment. Because He never commanded us to carry on like this. Therefore, beware of such worship!”

It was under the pressure of the Protestant Reformation, that the Anglican Church officially dropped the festival in 1548. It was later revived by the Church of England as a festival known as the Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion.

One of the first things you notice when you enter a Catholic Church is the Crucifix. It is highly unlikely that you will find one in the Sanctuary of a Protestant Church. But in a Catholic Church, a crucifix is always displayed as it represents both the promise of salvation and the means of Grace by which we are fed and sustained. There, displayed upon the Cross, is the Body of Christ, in Latin – Corpus Christi. It expresses the belief handed down through from Jesus through the Apostles, Early Church Fathers, and the Catholic faith throughout all generations that salvation comes from Jesus

Christ, and that through his Body and Blood we are washed from our sins and, as we pray, made one body with him, that He may dwell in us, and we in Him.

Too many Protestant leaders and theologians have tried to foster the false notion that the Real Presence in the Eucharist is a late corruption of faith by the Catholic Church. This is a myth. At the Last Supper, our Lord himself, when He took the bread, gave thanks for it, broke it and gave it to His disciples said, “This is my Body”. He didn’t say, “This is like my body” or “Pretend this is my body”, He said, “This *is* my Body.” No question, no ambiguity. This is – plain and simple.

St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, composed around 53-54 A.D., writes, *“<sup>23</sup> For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:*

*<sup>24</sup> And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*

*<sup>25</sup> After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.*

*<sup>26</sup> For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

*<sup>27</sup> Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”*

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, St. Justin Martyr wrote, “For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; [...] the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him... is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus.” ([\*First Apology\*, 66](#))

It is our human nature, that when we do things the same way, week after week, year after year, it becomes routine and we cease to consider what we are doing and why. I

often fear that is what happens with Christians when they come forward to receive communion. I knew many of the kids I grew up with in my neighborhood which was 99% Roman Catholic (my family, the Friedlanders, and the Whites who were AME being the other 1%) had no idea about their faith, except that they received presents for their First Communion and Confirmation. I remember one of my neighbors, Richie Chesz, explaining to me that everyone was originally Roman Catholic, but those who refused to believe became known as Jews and Protestants - I thought he was making it up until he had one of the Nuns from St. Paul's who taught Catechism at Forest School tell me that he was correct!

But Rich was no different than most Church-goers. Most people go to Church, or the Synagogue, or the Mosque because their parents and grandparents did. They do not go because of a knowledge of their faith that has lead them there or because of a close personal awareness of God. Many go only to be social. The Bishop can tell you of one of the missions that use to be in our Diocese that complained to him about their Priest-in-Charge who had the audacity to have Bible Study that interfered with the Coffee Hour. One of my friends, who attended my Ordination and has visited on other occasions, complains about the heresies in the Episcopal Church and speaks glowingly of our worship here, tells me he can't leave his current church to come here because they can't leave their friends who are at the heretical church!

The Church is not a social club or a place you go to fulfil some family obligation. It is a gift given to us by God to help us focus and center ourselves in Him and to receive nourishment for our souls. It is supposed to be the center of our community, the center of our education, and the center of our lives. It isn't someplace we go once a week to feel better about ourselves for going, but a place where we go to be recharged, fortified, and strengthened in our knowledge of love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ. It is the only place established by God for our spiritual renewal.

This morning, when the Bishop says the Canon of the Mass, after the Sanctus and Benedictus, listen to his words. As you listen, I want you to realize that the words of Consecration are the same words our Lord spoke to His disciples at the Last Supper, realize that the prayers he will read are essentially the same prayers said by the Apostles, confirmed in the Holy Gospels, the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Epistles of St. Paul, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century writings of the Early Church Fathers such as St. Justin Martyr, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, and others, and contained in the Sarum Missal of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century upon which our Anglican Missal is based. Listen as he invokes the Holy Spirit to sanctify the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Understand that through the mystery and grace of God, the sacrifice we offer isn't a new sacrifice, but the sacrifice made by our Lord on Calvary.

On this Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of the Holy Communion, the Commemoration of the Most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, this Corpus Christi, let each of us kneel at that Altar, open our hearts and souls to receive the Body and Blood of Lord Jesus Christ, be filled with His Grace and Heavenly Benediction, and be made one body with Him, that He may dwell in us, and we in Him.

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.