

HOMILY FOR CORPUS CHRISTI 2005

5:30, 8:45 and 10:30 Masses

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Introduction

My friends, today is the great *Solemnity of Corpus Christi*. On this Feast Catholics are called in a very particular way to reaffirm their faith in the Holy Eucharist and reexamine their standing vis-à-vis this great mystery.

The Doctrine of the Real Presence

The first thing I would like to do in this homily is to restate clearly what the truth is about the Holy Eucharist: Basing itself upon the very words and doctrine of the Lord Himself, the Catholic Church teaches and believes that the elements of Holy Communion are *Really, Truly and Substantially the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ*.

Although the *appearances* of bread and wine remain, the underlying reality of what we consume at Holy Mass is the *True Body and Blood of Christ*. We are not treating here of mere *symbols* of His Body and Blood, but in fact His Real Body and Blood.

Therefore it is false to think of the Holy Eucharist as “bread and wine,” since this does not correspond to the reality. What *begins* as bread and wine at the beginning of Mass is *changed* - by the power of God at the moment of Consecration - into the very Body and Blood of Christ.

The Scriptural Evidence

This doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is not the fabrication of men, but was taught with the utmost forcefulness by Jesus Himself. We see this teaching especially in the *Gospel of Saint John*, wherein Jesus repeatedly affirmed His Real Presence in the Eucharist. In

what is in a sense the 20 most amazing verses of the Bible, Jesus engaged in a dialogue with His listeners about the Eucharist in which He asserted eight times that He intended to give us His very flesh to eat and blood to drink”

I am the bread of life [35]...

The Jews murmured about Him... [41]

I am the bread of life [48] Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died [49]This is the bread that came down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die [50]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 [51]

The Jews quarrelled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” [52]

Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you. [53]

Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. [54]For My flesh is real food, and My blood true drink. [55] Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me and I in him.[56] Just as the living Father sent Me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on Me will have life because of Me. [57]. This is the bread that came down from Heaven...[58]

(N.B. is this to be understood figuratively? The following are how this expression was used in the Jewish context figuratively. Could Our Lord then have meant it figuratively?)

Will these evildoers never learn? They **devour my people as they devour bread**, they do not call upon the Lord [Psalm 14:4]

No man spares his brother, each **devours the flesh** of his neighbor [Isaiah 9:18]

I will make your oppressors **eat their own flesh**, and they shall be **drunk with their own blood**, as with the juice of the grape [Isaiah 49:26]

They **eat the flesh** of my people, and flay their skin from them... [Micah 3:3]

I saw that the woman was **drunk on the blood** of the holy ones and on the blood of the witnesses to Jesus [Revelation 17:6]

They will **eat her flesh** and consume her with fire [Rev. 17:16]

Thus the figurative interpretation of the protestants is seen to be absurd.

Then many of His disciples who were listening said: “*This saying is hard, who can accept it?*” [60]

Since Jesus knew that His disciples were murmuring about this, He said to them, **Does this shock you?** [61] What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? [62]

It is the Spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail.

The words I have spoken are spirit and life. [63]

(N.B. Does this passage undo the foregoing, as is often alleged?)

“Now the natural person does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God, for to him it is foolishness, and he cannot understand it, because it is judged spiritually. The spiritual person, however; can judge everything but is not subject to judgment by anyone...” (1 Cor 2:14-1)

But there are some of you who do not believe... [64]

We also have the witness of the **four accounts of the Last Supper**, all of which contain the words of Jesus stating plainly: “*This is My Body – This is the Cup of My Blood.*” This is recorded in Matthew (26:26-29), Mark (14:22-25), Luke (22:15-20), and 1 Corinthians (11:23-26).

Other passages in the Bible reveal the same truth. Saint Paul says forthrightly in his First Letter to the Corinthians: “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the **blood** of Christ? The bread we break, is it not a participation in the **body** of Christ?*” [1 Cor 10:16].

The Testimony of the Early Christians

The early Christians gave emphatic witness to this doctrine of the Real Presence. **St. Justin Martyr** (c. 150 AD) said: “*Not as common bread nor as common drink do we receive these; but...as we have been taught, the*

food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic Prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh are nourished, is both the Flesh and Blood of that incarnated Jesus.”¹

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (195 AD) said: “*He has declared the cup, a part of His creation, to be His own Blood, from which He causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, He has established as His own Body, from which He gives increase to our bodies.*”²

Concerning the Reception of Holy Communion

I say these things by way of preparation for an explanation of why the Catholic Church holds to the position it does with regard to the reception of the Holy Eucharist. We are not dealing here with a *mere symbol*, but with a sacred reality – a profound moment of intimacy with God Himself.

Therefore it should go without saying that the Holy Eucharist cannot be indiscriminately distributed. There are some essential requisites that must be satisfied before one may approach the altar to partake in the Sacred Body and Blood of Our Lord.

First Requisite: Catholic Faith in the Real Presence

Firstly, receiving Holy Communion is *an act of communion* with the Church from which one receives it. Therefore, if one is *not* in communion with the Catholic Church it makes no sense to make a public statement to that effect by coming forward to receive the Eucharist. For this reason also, Catholics are forbidden by the Church from taking the bread and wine

¹ Saint Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 66, 20.

² Against Heresies 5, 2, 2

offered as communion in Protestant churches, even should those churches offer it to us.³

Second Requisite: Freedom from Mortal Sin

The second requisite for reception of the Eucharist, and an absolutely essential one at that, is **freedom from mortal sin**. In other words, for a Catholic worthily to receive the Sacred Body and Blood of Our Lord, he or she must not be conscious of having committed any grave sin that has not yet been repented of, confessed and absolved in the Sacrament of Confession.

A person in the state of mortal sin who receives the Holy Eucharist compounds the imperilled status of his or her soul and commits the *sin of sacrilege*.

The Holy Scriptures state this very clearly: *“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the Body and Blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.”* [1 Cor 11:27-29]

³ N.B. This discipline is relaxed in the case of the Eastern Orthodox and Pre-Chalcedonian Churches, in light of our common sacramental theology. It is also relaxed in the case a validly baptized Protestant who is 1. **in danger of death or other grave necessity**, 2. is cut off from his own minister, 3. is properly disposed, 4. professes Catholic faith in the Real Presence and who 5. asks for it on his own. This is done in light of impending eternity.