

Corpus Christi Sunday, 2 June 2024

Scriptures: Exodus 24:3-8; Heb. 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16,22-26

Homily: Fr. Ken

Today's Gospel is a foundation document for us. From the beginning, Christians assembled in private homes and relived the Last Supper; and Communion was taken to the sick people who could not attend. St. Justin Martyr describes this in the very early second century. So, the very celebration of Mass, and Holy Communion, are as old as the Church itself. It followed logically that the custom developed of keeping consecrated Holy Communion hosts somewhere safe, so that they would be available to the priest or deacon when needed in emergency situations.

By the tenth century, tabernacles had still not yet been created. However, above the altar was hung a dove-shaped container called a pyx, and the Blessed Sacrament (consecrated Communion hosts) could be placed inside. Gradually people reflected on the significance of this: Jesus is present. This really is the body and blood of the risen and living Lord. He deserves our attention, indeed our adoration, not only at the very moment of receiving Communion at Mass, but whenever we come into the Church. The great saint and scholar of the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, wrote superb hymns in praise of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, some of which are still sung in Church today.

In time, the custom developed of carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession, for the veneration of believers. Thus, as the Church faithful gradually became aware of the full dimension of this glorious gift of the Eucharist, the summertime feast of Corpus Christi was initiated with the full title, "The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ".

In many countries throughout the world, there are still today processions through the streets, with the Blessed Sacrament carried in the monstrance: children scatter rose petals, people hang colored banners from their windows, and town bands play religious music. (You can view photographs of these processions in Guatemala, participated in by members of our St. Rita Guatemala delegations, posted in the glass display case in the vestibule of the Church.)

What about each one of us on this Corpus Christi weekend?

At the Communion of our Mass, we receive Jesus Christ into our life. Also, in the tabernacle of our Church, Our Lord Jesus Christ is real and is welcoming. The sanctuary candle with a lit flame is the sign of that presence.

Christ invites us to come and spend time with him. The tabernacle is a place for face-to-face encounter, and the face of Jesus is a challenging face, but also a smiling face, an understanding face, an encouraging face, a forgiving face, a true face of mercy.

If we had lived in Galilee or Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, we would have had the greatest difficulty in getting anywhere near him, what with the curious crowds and the scores of sick people. And if we did get the chance to speak to him, after a minute someone else would have elbowed us out of the way. Here, in the Eucharist, we can have that quiet, prolonged, personal conversation that is the heart of all prayer.

Today is a day on which we can reflect on the full beauty of this great gift that we are given. May we always feel the gentle presence of Jesus, drawing us to himself.

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