

SOLEMNITY OF THE BODY & BLOOD OF THE LORD – CORPUS CHRISTI

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This solemnity goes back to the thirteenth century. It was first established in the diocese of Liège, and Pope Urban IV instituted it in 1264 for the whole church. The meaning of this feast is the consideration of and devotion to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The center of the feast was to be, as Pope Urban IV described it, a popular devotion reflected in hymns and joy. In the same year Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), at the Pope's request, composed for this day two Offices which have nourished the piety of many Christians throughout the centuries. In many different places the procession with the monstrance through especially bedecked streets gives testimony of the Christian people's faith and love for Christ, who once again passes through our cities and towns. The procession began in the same way as the feast itself. In places where the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood is not observed as a holy day of obligation, it is kept on the Sunday after the Most Holy Trinity as its proper day.

Today we celebrate this great Solemnity in honor of the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. On this day the liturgy itself and popular piety, which have spared no efforts in their search for inventiveness and beauty, come together to sing to the *Love of loves*. For this day Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) composed those very beautiful texts of the Mass and of the Liturgy of the Hours. Today we must give many thanks to God for having remained amongst us, make atonement to him and express to him our joy at having him so close to us:

It was faith in the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist that led to devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament outside the Mass as well. In the first centuries of the Church the Sacred Species were reserved so that Communion could be taken to the sick and those who were in prison awaiting martyrdom because they had confessed their faith. As time went by, the faith and love of believers caused them to make both public and private devotion to the Eucharist far richer. Their faith led them to treat the Body of Christ with the greatest possible reverence and this also led to greater public devotion. We can find many testimonies in the most ancient documents of the Church to the veneration by the early Christians which later was to make way for the feast we celebrate today.

Our Lord and our God is in the Tabernacle. Christ is in the Tabernacle, and it is there that we must show him our adoration and our love. This veneration for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is expressed in many ways: Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, processions, prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, genuflections that are real acts of faith and of adoration. Among these devotions and various forms of worship, particularly worthy of mention is the solemnity of Corpus Christi as a public act by which the Church seeks to pay homage to Christ present in the Eucharist. The Church and the world have great need of eucharistic devotions. Jesus is waiting for us in this sacrament of Love. Let us not be sparing in the time we spend going to meet him in adoration, in contemplation filled with faith, and let us be prepared to make reparation for the many grave faults and offences committed against him in the world. May our adoration never cease. Today especially has to be filled with acts of faith and of love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

As the words of the *Entrance Antiphon* remind us: *He has fed them with the finest wheat, and give them their fill of honey from the rock*, so for many years God fed manna to the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. This was an image and symbol of the pilgrim Church and of each individual who journeys towards his or her definitive homeland, Heaven. That food given in the desert of Sinai is a figure of the true food, the Holy Eucharist. This is the sacrament of the human pilgrimage.

Precisely because of this, the annual feast of the Eucharist that the Church celebrates today contains in its liturgy so many references to the pilgrimage of the people of the Covenant in their wanderings through the wilderness. Moses often reminded the Israelites of this wonderful deed that God has performed for his People: Do not then forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Today is a day of thanksgiving and joy because God has wanted to remain with us in order to feed us and to strengthen us, so that we may never feel alone. The Holy Eucharist is the *viaticum*, the food for the long journey of our days on Earth towards the goal of true Life. Jesus accompanies us and strengthens us here in this world, where our life is like a shadow compared to the reality that awaits us. Earthly food is a pale image of the food we receive in Holy Communion. The Holy Eucharist opens up our hearts to a completely new reality.

Although we celebrate this feast only once a year, the Church really proclaims this most happy truth every day: Jesus gives himself to us daily as our food, and He remains in our Tabernacles to be for us the strength and the hope of a new life, a life without end and without limit. It is a mystery which is ever alive and ever new.

The Church, by means of the feast we are celebrating today with an exuberance of faith and of love, desires only to dispel the mysterious silence that surrounds the Eucharist, and to emit a triumphant cry that bursts out through the walls of sanctuaries and overwhelms the streets of cities so as to infuse the whole human community with joy at the presence of Christ, of him who is the silent and strong companion of pilgrim man along the paths of time and of earth. This is it that fills our hearts with joy. It is logical, especially on this day, that the hymns that accompany the Blessed Sacrament should be hymns of adoration, of love, and of profound joy.

Let us ask Our Lord, then, to make us souls devoted to the Blessed Eucharist, so that our relationship with him brings forth joy and serenity and a desire for justice. In this way we will make it easier for others to recognize Christ; we will put Christ at the center of all human activities. And Jesus' promise will be fulfilled: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (*John 12:32*).