

FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

The name 'Corpus Christi' is the Latin word for 'the Body of Christ'. **The Feast of Corpus Christi** is celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday or on the following Sunday. **It is the celebration of the truth of the 'transubstantiation' of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Holy Mass.** The Eucharistic Procession is a special feature of the celebration of this feast, and it was endowed with indulgences by Pope Martin V and Eugene IV.

The introduction of Corpus Christi as a feast in the Christian Liturgy was primarily due to the petition of the 13th Century Augustinian nun Juliana of Liege. From her early youth, Juliana had veneration for the Blessed Sacrament, and always longed for a special feast in its honour. This desire is said to have been increased by a vision of the Church under the appearance of full moon leaving one dark spot, which signifies the absence of such a Solemnity. In 1208 she reported her first vision of Christ to her Confessor Priest as instructed by the Lord to plead for the institution of the feast of the Corpus Christi. The vision was repeated for the next twenty years. In 1263, Pope Urban IV investigated the claims of a Eucharistic Miracle at Bolsena, in which a Consecrated Host began to bleed. In 1264 he issued the Papal bull in which Corpus Christi was made a feast throughout the entire Latin Rite. This was the very first papally sanctioned feast in the history of the Latin Rite.

It is a feast focused solely on the Holy Eucharist. **"The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life"** (II Vatican Council -Lumen Gentium). As Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, it is 'a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the Cross' (1366). By celebrating the Eucharist, we proclaim that Jesus has not withdrawn from the world; He has not left us alone.

When Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (Jn. 13.1). **The Eucharist is essentially the fullest act of gratitude prefigured in Melchizedek, finding its fulfilment in the Sacrifice of Christ.** Every Mass is a participation in and celebration of the Sacrifice of Jesus, but the feast of the Corpus Christi is the time to be especially aware of the Eucharist: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk.22.19)

"As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor.11.26). With these words St .Paul reminds us that the celebration of the 'Lord's Supper 'is the memorial of the Redeeming Sacrifice of Christ. As Blessed Pope John Paul II said in his homily announcing the Year of the Eucharist, "there is a close relationship between "building the Eucharist" and "proclaiming Christ"....**We are reliving this wonderful reality in the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, during which the Church not only celebrates the Eucharist but solemnly bears it in procession, publicly proclaiming that the Sacrifice of Christ is for the salvation of the world".**

In the Sacrament of baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit; we are also given a commission to live the Christ-like life with the help of the 'sanctifying gifts' (Is.11.2) which the Holy Spirit gives us in Baptism. In the Holy Eucharist we are fed by the Sacramental Body and Blood of Christ; we are transformed by what we eat and drink, to become ourselves the mystical Body of Christ. Nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ we are 'send forth' to live His Presence in the world today. **'To receive in faith the gift of His Eucharist is to receive the Lord Himself'** (CCC 1336). "Just as I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me" (Jn.6.57). Bl. Mother Theresa, Bl. Pope John Paul II and the Saints and Martyrs down the centuries could be a sign of the Presence of Jesus in the world because of this 'indescribable

gift' (2 Cor.9.15).

As Pope Benedict XVI said in his sermon on 21.04.2011 for the Holy Thursday Mass of the Last Supper, challenging us: "Jesus desires us, He waits for us. But what about us? Do we really desire Him? Are we anxious to meet Him? Do we desire to encounter Him, to become one with Him, to receive the gifts He offers in the Holy Eucharist? Or are we indifferent, distracted, and **busy about other things?**

We have every reason to celebrate this solemn feast of Corpus Christi to thank God for His indescribable gift and to live our faith in proclaiming the truth.

We had the privilege of participating in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and joining in the Eucharistic Procession in a church in Bratislava, SK this year. We were edified by the number of attendance , overflowing the big church, and the Eucharistic Procession, with the 'little angels' dressed in their First communion dress, throwing the flowers honouring the Lord. In spite of the rain, people did follow the Lord in procession, adoring Him at 4 different altars prepared outside in the public place.

Such events are not so common these days but the importance of this feast should not be forgotten. This is a very special and memorable occasion where we can all remember our own first communion day and that of our children. Mass attendances for such solemn celebrations are coming down; but it is a real challenge for all of us to keep our faith alive.

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