

Later in the morning at the healing center we were invited to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. The celebrant was an Episcopalian priest. Before Mass he shared that he understood that Catholics were not allowed by their Church to receive Communion in a non-Catholic churches, but that many Catholic priests had been to these mass and received, and once even a Roman Catholic bishop received. He wanted the Catholics present to know they were welcomed to receive at this mass. Earlier I had introduced myself as a priest and I felt that after what this man had just shared, love demanded that I accept his invitation to receive at his Mass. After receiving the host and while going back to my pew I recalled the powerful experience of receiving at Marywood just a few hours earlier. I sat in my pew and again went into my heart, just as I had done at my private mass. What I felt at this Mass was different. I felt a spiritual, holy, and beautiful presence of Jesus, but it was not the Real Presence.

Suddenly, I become the great Eucharistic theologian. The Catholic Church believes that in the Eucharist the bread and wine are actually transformed objectively, and become in a real sense the body and blood of Christ. The consecrated elements retain the forms of bread and wine, but are in reality the actual body and blood of Christ. At my private Mass in Marywood that is exactly what I felt. The Protestant Churches has traditionally seen the Eucharist as being only a symbolic or spiritual presence of Jesus. And, that is exactly what I felt receiving in the Protestant Church a few hours later. My experience that morning in Jacksonville had perfectly matched the theology of the two Churches.

When I was pastor of a small parish in western Marin and at the same involved in a very powerful healing ministry, a famous Buddhist monk from Burma came to visit me.

First, I took him around our buildings and grounds. When we walked into the small Blessed Sacrament chapel in our office building, the monk immediately dropped to his knees in front to the tabernacle in profound adoration. He remained in veneration for over a minute. The irony of the moment was inescapable: vast numbers of Catholics walk into church today without showing the slightest indication that the Real Presence of Our Savior of the world is right there in front of them. Yet, here was a monk from a completely different tradition and faith giving the most beautiful, moving, and powerful veneration to the Blessed Sacrament that I have ever seen.

Right now, at this very moment, the Person who loves us more than anyone else in the world is waiting to touch the depths of our hearts with His love. He can be found, literally found, in each and every Catholic church in the world. Yes, he is waiting for us in our own parish church. On this feast of Corpus Christi let us respond to His incredible passion for us by making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Let's sit with the Lover for a good period of time. He will fill us with a love that is beyond description. We will leave thanking Him for His ineffable invitation and for the grace to have accepted it. And, even better, let's makes every day the feast of Corpus Christi. For each time we visit the Blessed Sacrament we are drawn deeper and deeper into his eternal Love.

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Homily on the Feast of Corpus Christi

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The feast of Corpus Christi was the doing of Juliana of Liege, a thirteenth-century nun, who claimed that God had been instructing her to establish a feast day commemorating the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper. In 1237 her local bishop in response to her vision ordered a celebration of Corpus Christi to be held each year thereafter. This celebration spread to other dioceses in Europe and on September 8, 1264, Pope Urban IV established the Feast of Corpus Christi as a universal feast of the Church, to be celebrated on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday. Today in the United States the feast is celebrated on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday.

For centuries after, the feast was also celebrated with a Eucharistic procession, in which the Sacred Host was carried throughout the town, accompanied by hymns and litanies. The faithful would venerate the Body of Christ as the procession passed by. I remember in the 1940s going to my grandmother's parish with my family and joining in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament around the streets of San Francisco. As a small child I can't begin to tell you how much that impressed me. In recent years this practice has almost disappeared, though some parishes still hold a brief procession around the outside of the parish church.

Today the celebration of Corpus Christi, which means the Body of Christ in Latin, is needed more than ever. Less than thirty percent of Roman Catholics still believe that the consecrated host and wine at Mass are truly the Body, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ.

About fifteen years ago I was preparing our second graders to receive their First Holy Communion. At one point I asked the class of thirty seven year olds if the next day they would actually be receiving Jesus when for the first time they received Communion. Six or seven of the children did not think so. I was startled.

I asked the young children why they did not believe they would be receiving Jesus. Most of them had been instructed by their parents, or an aunt or uncle, not to believe. Some were told it was good to believe it was really Jesus, but actually it is just a piece of bread.

As you know, the definition of theology is faith seeking understanding. I decide to turn these second graders into theologians. I suggest that the next day immediately after receiving the consecrated host they return to their pews, kneel down, place their hands over their eyes, go into their hearts, and try very hard to tell if what they had just received was a piece of bread or Jesus Christ.

On Monday when I asked how many felt it was just a piece of bread they received on Saturday, not one hand went up. When I asked how many felt it was Jesus whom they received on Saturday, all thirty hands shot up without any hesitation, high and strong. Each and every one of them had no doubt whatsoever it was not a piece of bread but Jesus they received. A piece of bread simply cannot make you feel like that inside.

If you read the description of the early Christians long before a Eucharistic theology was developed or the word transubstantiation was used, you will see they had the exact same faith in the Eucharist as those second graders at St. Anselm's Church.

St. Ignatius of Antioch: "I have no taste for the food that perishes nor for the pleasures of this life. I want the Bread of God which is the Flesh of Christ, who was the seed of David; and

for drink I desire His Blood which is love that cannot be destroyed." 100 A.D

St. Justin Martyr: "This food we call the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us. For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Savior being incarnate by God's Word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the Word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus." 150 A.D.

St. Irenaeus of Lyon: [Christ] has declared the cup, a part of 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. 180 A.D.

St Ephraim: And extending His hand, He gave them the Bread which His right hand had made holy: 'Take, all of you eat of this; which My word has made holy. Do not now regard as bread that which I have given you; but take, eat this Bread, and do not scatter the crumbs; for what I have called My Body, that it is indeed. One particle from its crumbs is able to sanctify thousands and thousands, and is sufficient to afford life to those who eat of it. Take, eat, entertaining no doubt of faith, because this is My Body, and whoever eats it in belief eats in it Fire and Spirit. But if any doubter eat of it, for him it will be only bread. And whoever eats in belief the Bread made holy in My name, if he be pure, he will be preserved in his purity; and if he be a sinner, he will be forgiven.' But if anyone despise it or reject it or treat it with ignominy, it may be taken as certainty that he treats with

ignominy the Son, who called it and actually made it to be His Body.", 350 A.D.

St. Athanasius: This bread and this wine, so long as the prayers and supplications have not taken place, remain simply what they are. But after the great prayers and holy supplications have been sent forth, the Word comes down into the bread and wine - and thus His Body is conformed." 373 A.D.

Unfortunately, other Christian denominations do not share in this same rich Eucharistic tradition. A few years ago I went to Jacksonville for a week of healing prayer at Francis and Judith MacNutt's Christian Healing Ministries. When the sessions were over at four in the afternoon, I would go immediately to Marywood Catholic Retreat House for a night of quiet prayer. For me it was a week of being prayed over for healing during the day and spending time alone praying with the Blessed Sacrament at night. I wanted to include in this the Mass, but unless I were to say it by myself, this would not be possible - I was the only guest that week at the retreat house. A few years before a priest friend of mine had told me that we priests now have permission from the pope to say a private mass, something that I had not done in all my years as priest.

The first morning at seven o'clock I celebrated Mass alone in the Marywood chapel. It felt very strange saying, "The Lord be with you" and having no one respond. All during the mass I keep wondering, "Is this a valid Mass?" After Communion I sat down and silently went into my heart, just as I had instructed the second graders at St. Anselm's. I can tell you without a doubt the pope was right in allowing priests to say Mass alone. I found my heart was filled with the same loving presence of Jesus that it is every time I receive Holy Communion - a presence that cannot be given by bread, but a Real Presence. Yes, yes, it was a valid Mass.