

## Corpus Christi

Year C

Dt 8:2-3, 14b-16a  
Ps 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20  
I Cor 10:16-17  
Jn 6:51-58

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“Receive what you are, become what you receive, for this is the Body of Christ. Happy are we who are called to this banquet.”

I use words like these at the “Lamb of God” as a paraphrase of Augustine’s thoughts on the Eucharist. Each time we celebrate the Eucharistic mysteries we participate in becoming the very Body of Christ that we receive. We receive the unity that we are called to be. We become united as members of one body, the body of Christ.

One of my first public homilies was on this feast. I was a student chaplain at a city hospital and it was my turn to lead the hospital Sunday morning worship service. As part of the process we had to present our thoughts before we preached. As the only Roman Catholic, I thought I would share this “catholic” feast with the other Christian communities. They were excited at the name of the feast, but only saw the “community” dimensions of the Body of Christ, and missed the “sacramental dimensions. I learned from them how intertwined the two thoughts are. We cannot celebrate the sacramental celebration without the communal celebration. This is a wonderful part of this feast. We are the body of Christ, the community, who becomes the Body of Christ, the sacramental presence of Christ to the world.

The mystery of the Eucharistic is as much the transformation of the community as it is the awesome experience of the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is this marvelous transformation that changes us and makes the real presence so real throughout the world. It is not limited to the marvelous mystery of the transubstantiation as celebrated in our catholic doctrines. This total transformation is the power that keeps faithful catholic communities alive. We are all changed, and we are never the same after we participate in the transformation.

I find the whole experience of Eucharist to be so powerful. As we gather, all from our separate homes and worlds, we re-form the Body of Christ. We together praise our God and hear his holy Word. We together hear the story of salvation, and hear the Good News proclaimed. We together reflect on the Word, and let it touch our lives today. I always cringe a bit when someone says they can “come late” and still have mass “count” as long as they are here for the “Offertory”. What a shame that this part of the Eucharist is often ignored! I never know what to say when someone says “it’s too hot today Father, can you cut the readings and the homily?” I think of the disciples on the road to Emmaus who tell us how their hearts were burning in side as Jesus explained the Scriptures to them.

The transformation continues as we present our gifts, and our lives to the Lord in the form of the offering of bread and wine, the “stuff” of our lives. So often I encourage people going through struggles to just “give it up” to God at Mass. Place your needs and worries, your hopes and aspirations, and even your joys and glories at the altar of the Lord. The bread and wine are the symbols of all these things. We give them up to God, and through the liturgy, the Holy Spirit is called upon “ these gifts to make them holy”. They are no longer “our” issues. They now belong to God and we trust in God’s power to deal with it all.

The Eucharistic Prayer unites our prayers, and calls upon the whole Body of Christ, the church on earth, reflected in the name of the bishop and pope, the needs of the whole people of God in both the living and the dead, and the whole church glorified in heaven in Mary and the saints. No mass can take place alone. Even when priests cannot gather a congregation, they call upon the whole Body of Christ to be with them. This gathering of the “saints” is essential to celebrate the Body of Christ.

Only now can we really experience the totality of the mystery of the Eucharistic. St. Paul’s proclamation in the reading today reminds us that this is a “participation” in the body and blood of Christ: the very life of our Savior. We find his life in his Body, the Body of Christ. I worry at times about the growing numbers of Catholic communities that are not able to participate in this transformation due to the lack of ordained priests. Each Sunday, and many more weekdays, communities gather to hear the Word of God and then receive the consecrated hosts from a previous Eucharistic celebration. The transformative process of “becoming the Body of Christ” is being lost too often. I hope and pray that this does not become the norm. What a loss of such a sacred experience!

We are the Body of Christ. This is proclaimed in the scriptures, and in the teaching of the church. The Eucharistic is the Body of Christ. As we celebrate today, let us all be transformed, open our hearts to the power of the Spirit and become what we are called to be. Let the teachings of St. Augustine remind us of the transformative power of the Eucharist. Let this power be our life, our strength, our God. The dignity we offer the tabernacle and the sacred reverence we give to the consecrated host and sacred cup are also due to each other, the Body of Christ. The possibilities that God has in store for us are endless. Through this sacrament, we are united with our God and one another. Consider the power of this gathered community if we act and believe in that dignity in each other. God has great things in store for us. His power for us is found in us, in his Body of Christ.