

Corpus Christi Sunday

John 6:51-58

Today is what we traditionally call “Corpus Christi” Sunday, “Body of Christ” Sunday. How unusual: we gather to celebrate someone’s *body*. Of course, we are not celebrating just *anyone’s* body, or just *any* body. We celebrate the *Body of Christ*.

Today we acknowledge, in a special way, this mysterious gift we call “Eucharist” or “Communion”

In the end, this gift is the reason for the Church.

In the end, therefore, this gift is the reason we go to church.

Why do we go to church?

It is a *great* and important question, for the list of reasons *not* to go is *long*.

One often hears it said,

- “You don’t need to go to church to be a good person.” *or*
- “You don’t need to go to church to pray”.

Both statements are true.

We do not go to church to be good persons.

We do not go to church simply to pray.

We go to church to receive a gift that we cannot give to ourselves at home.

We go to church to receive *Jesus in the Eucharist*.

We go to church because

“unless we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood we have no life within us.”

Such is the Eucharist: “the flesh and blood of the Son of Man”

- which Jesus suggests is necessary so to enter into fullness of intimacy with Him.
- which Jesus suggests leads to a unique experience of love with God.

Do we really believe in the Eucharist?

Do we *really* believe that

- the bread and the wine become the body and blood of Jesus?
- Jesus transforms the bread and the wine into an abiding presence of His?

It is not easy to believe.

Consider the response of the Jews in this encounter:

“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (verse 52)

or the response of the disciples

“This is a hard saying. Who can accept it?” (verse 60)

It was *so* hard for Jesus’ own disciples to believe and accept that

“many returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.” (verse 66)

“Sorry Lord, can’t go there. Good luck.”

We come to church precisely *to go there*.
It is all about going there: receiving this gift which is too deep for words.
Everything revolves around this. Everything flows from this.
Such is why you will notice in a Catholic church that the *altar* is central.
What is central in an evangelical, a mega-church?
The pulpit (or the drum set!). There is no altar.
“Evangelical” Christians think we are *terribly* misguided.
Are we?

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,
you have no life within you.” (verse 53)
We take this seriously—as outlandish as it may sound.
We *believe* in this mysterious gift. It is truly a question of faith.

The Eucharist is what makes the Catholic Church unique *and* challenging.
Jesus in the Eucharist is *uniquely* intimate.
Jesus in the Eucharist, because deeply present, giving Himself, is also painfully quiet,
and thus *challenging* to our sensibility.

Such is the big difference between the Mass and a service in a mega-church.
For us, all roads lead to the Eucharist, to this silent presence of the God-man on the altar.
There can and ought to be exultation (there is *no* reason for boring sermons or music!).
But, at one point, all becomes silent in the Eucharistic presence of the King.
At a mega-church, the goal is power praise
—if I may playfully call it “emotional shock therapy”.
In the Catholic perspective, power is relative to *love*.
And love eventually brings about silence.

But this is *challenging* for us.
“Jesus do something, say something!”
Jesus is more than doing and saying.
He is loving, silently, the best way it is done, and He offers Himself to be taken:

“O sacred banquet at which Christ is consumed”
(Thomas Aquinas, “Ad Sacrosanctum Sacramentum”)

The same Thomas Aquinas notes, quite amazingly:
“Material food changes into the one who eats it. Spiritual food, on the other hand,
changes the person who eats it into itself. Thus the effect proper to this Sacrament
is the conversion of a person into Christ, so that Christ lives in him.”
(Commentary on Book IV of the Sentences, d.12, q.2, a.11)

The love that Jesus pours forth in this gift of Himself also joins us to one another.
After you receive Communion, you can look around the church (discreetly, of course!),
and tell yourself that you are now closer to every single person here. ... Yikes!!!
The Eucharist makes us Church,
because it communicates the love which binds us to one another as Brothers and Sisters.
This divine love sends us to one another,
enabling us to welcome any and all, even enemies.

This divine love sends us into the world to love it unto God.
Hence, the importance of the *commissioning* at the “end” of Mass
“Go in the peace of Christ”.

I personally find it misleading to say “the Mass has ended”.

In a sense, the Mass *begins in us*, and spills into the world.

What we receive we do not receive just for ourselves.

The Eucharist is eminently *personal*, but not *private*.

We are *sent forth* in the power of the Holy Spirit,

Who is freshly poured upon us when we receive the Eucharist.

To “eat and run” shows that we have not understood

- what we receive
- who we are in Christ
- that we have Brothers and Sisters
- that the world awaits the love we have received

If all of this seems too far-fetched, then we owe it to ourselves, and, of course, to Christ,

- to say so to Him
- to come before him with utter simplicity and honesty,
asking that He reveal his truth to us

What is at stake is too precious for us to sit on the sidelines.

We are called to fall in love with Jesus,

and He gives a unique gift so that it happen...

“Do you realize that Jesus is there in the tabernacle expressly for you—for you alone?

He burns with desire to come into your heart...

The guest of our soul knows our misery.

He comes to find an empty tent within us---that is all He asks...”

(Saint Therese of Lisieux)