



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION FOR THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 29 May 1997

1. *“This is my body which is for you.... This cup is the new covenant in my blood.... Do this ... in remembrance of me”* (1 Cor 11:24-25).

Today’s liturgy commemorates the great mystery of the Eucharist with a clear reference to Holy Thursday. Last Holy Thursday we were here at the Lateran Basilica, as we are every year, to commemorate the Lord’s Supper. At the end of the Mass in “Caena Domini”, the short procession accompanied the Blessed Sacrament to the chapel of reposition, where it remained until the solemn Easter Vigil. Today we are preparing for a far more solemn procession which will take us through the streets of the city.

In today’s feast, the words Jesus spoke in the Upper Room help us to relive the same feelings as those of Holy Thursday: “Take; this is my body”; “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mk 14:22-24). These words, just proclaimed, bring us even further into the mystery of the incarnate Word of God who, under the appearances of bread and wine, gives himself to every person as the food and drink of salvation.

2. In the Gospel acclamation, John offers us a significant key to interpreting the divine Master’s words, by stating what he said of himself near Capernaum: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever” (Jn 6:51).

Thus we find in today’s readings the full meaning of the mystery of salvation. If the first reading taken from Exodus (cf. Ex 24:3-8) refers us to the Old Covenant made between God and Moses through the blood of sacrificial animals, in the Letter to the Hebrews it is recalled that Christ

“entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood” (9:11-15).

Today’s solemnity therefore helps us to give Christ the centrality which is his due in the divine plan for humanity, and spurs us to configure our lives more and more to him, the Eternal High Priest.

3. *Mystery of faith!* Today’s solemnity has been, down the centuries, an object of particular attention in various popular Christian traditions. How many public devotions have developed around the worship of the Eucharist. Theologians and pastors have striven to make the ineffable mystery of divine Love understood in human language.

The great doctor of the Church, St Thomas Aquinas, has a special place among these authoritative voices. In his poetic compositions, he sings with inspired transport the believer’s sentiments of adoration and love before the mystery of the Lord’s Body and Blood. One need only think of the famous “*Pange, lingua*”, which is a profound meditation on the Eucharistic mystery, the mystery of the Lord’s Body and Blood — “*gloriosi Corporis mysterium, Sanguinisque pretios*”.

And again, the hymn “*Adoro te, devote*”, which is an invitation to adore the God hidden under the Eucharistic species: *Latens Deitas, quae sub his figuris vere latitas: Tibi se cor meum totum subiicit!* Yes, our whole heart is abandoned to you, O Christ, because whoever accepts your word discovers the full meaning of life and finds true peace ... *quia te contemplans totum deficit.*

4. Gratitude for such an extraordinary gift springs spontaneously from the heart. “What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? *Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus, quae retribuit mihi?*” (Ps 116 [115]:12). The psalmist’s words can be recited by each one of us, with the awareness of the inestimable gift the Lord has given us in the Eucharistic sacrament. “I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord”: this attitude of praise and adoration resounds today in the prayers and hymns of the Church in every corner of the earth.

It resounds this evening, here in Rome, where the spiritual heritage of the Apostles Peter and Paul lives on. In a little while we will once again intone this ancient hymn of adoration and praise, as we walk through the streets of the city, going from this basilica to that of St Mary Major. We will repeat with devotion:

Pange, lingua, gloriosi ...

Sing, my tongue, the Saviour's glory,
Of his flesh the mystery sing!

And again:

Nobis datus, nobis natus
Ex intacta virgine....

Of a pure and spotless Virgin,
Born for us on earth below....

In supremae nocte caenae

Recumbens cum fratribus...

On the night of that last supper
Seated with his chosen band....

Cibus turbae duodenae

Se dat suis manibus.

Then as food to all his brethren
Gives himself with his own hand.

5. Sacrament of the gift, sacrament of Christ's love pushed to the extreme: "in finem dilexit" (Jn 13:1), the Son of God gives himself. Under the appearances of bread and wine, he gives his Body and Blood, taken from Mary, his Virgin Mother. He gives his divinity and his humanity, to enrich us indescribably.

Tantum ergo Sacramentum

Veneremur cernui

Let us adore the Sacrament that the Father gave us.

Amen.

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