

## Sermon for the Feast Of Corpus Christi 2019

Dearly Beloved,

In the sequence for today's Mass, St. Thomas Aquinas writes,

*Quantum potes, tantum aude:*

*Quia major omni laude,*

*Nec laudare sūfficis.*

Colloquially translated: As much as you can, dare to praise; but even if all praise were given, your words would never suffice. Thus, the preacher's task today is difficult, but I will attempt to say something worthy, spurred on by Thomas' admonition: *Quantum potes, tantum aude.*

This feast was first celebrated in 1265, legislated by Pope Urban IV as a response to the private revelations of the Norbertine canoness Juliana of Liege, and more especially to the Eucharistic miracle at Bolsena where the host began to bleed on the corporal after the priest doubted the Real Presence. By these divine interventions, we now have a day set aside when we adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with all our devotion and attention. This is fitting because when we ought to most fully contemplate the mystery of His Body and Blood, at its institution on Holy Thursday, we are too overcome by the grief of Judas' betrayal and Our Lord's Passion to properly consider it.

St. Angela of Foligno says that "If we but paused for a moment to consider attentively what takes place in this Sacrament, the thought of Christ's love for us would transform the coldness of our hearts into a fire of love and gratitude." So, let us pause and consider attentively the mystery of Christ's Body and Blood.

The sacrament has a threefold significance, in regard to the past, the present, and the future. In regard to the past, it is called a Sacrifice, for it represents the Sacrifice of the Cross in its symbolism. When the priest consecrates the elements on the altar, the bread and the wine are consecrated separately, to symbolize the real separation of Christ's Body and Blood on the Cross. Although they are not now separated, for Christ's body is glorified, on the altar the Body and Blood are symbolically distinct to remind us of His Passion. But again, it is a symbol of the passion: when we receive one of the elements, under the species of bread or wine, we receive the whole Christ, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, for that is how he lives right now. We do not receive the dead Christ upon the Cross, but the Living Son of God, who reigns in heaven.

The sacrament is also a Sacrifice in that it is the same Priest and Victim as on the Cross, and it applies the merits of that Cross to each one of us. It is true that Christ died for all, but that salvific death must be applied to each individual for it to benefit us. And those benefits come principally through the sacraments, most especially the Sacrament of the Altar, which reminds us of the Passion, and then gives us the fruits to transform our lives from within.

In the regard to the present, the sacrament is called Communion, for it unites each of us directly to Christ, and then indirectly to one another by way of our union with Christ. This ought to remind us that our goal in life is union with God first, and union with human beings, second. If we kept this in mind at all times, how much happier we would be! We commune with God first, then are joined more intimately to the other members of Christ's Body.

But the union with one another is not optional or insignificant: we are truly united to one another through our union to Christ, and that means we ought to act like it. As St. Paul says in Ephesians, "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God has forgiven you in Christ."

And the future: the sacrament bears the name Viaticum because it is for travelers on the way to a final and unchanging destination, that of heaven. We are reminded each time we receive that we are not made for this life, but for the next one. There the manna will cease because we will have definitive union with God instead of the transitory unions of this life wandering in the desert.

To fully benefit from St. Angela's wisdom: "If we but paused for a moment to consider attentively what takes place in this Sacrament, the thought of Christ's love for us would transform the coldness of our hearts into a fire of love and gratitude," we should also consider what our lives would be like without this sacrament.

Firstly, there would be no definitive, special presence of God on earth. Catholic churches would still be consecrated for the worship of God, but upon entering them, we would not sense the divine presence as we do know, that presence that strengthens us to begin the day, consoles us in our trials, and reminds us that God is in control. Without this sacrament, it would be a much lonelier, forlorn world and we would grope for eternity with much less peace.

Second, there would be no priesthood. The primary purposes of the priesthood are to consecrate the bread and wine at Mass, and to forgive sins so that the faithful may better receive Communion to the glory of God and their own sanctification. Although priests do many other good things, there would be no point in having a class of men set apart to minister at the altar unless Our Lord had instituted the Eucharist on the eve of His death. A world without priests would be almost unbearable.

Third, we would not have a daily remedy for our sins, a daily healing of our interior wounds, a daily consolation in our sorrows, a daily boost in our striving for holiness. The Eucharist supplies us with so much we do not see or fully appreciate. It is like the parable of the man who sows the seed and then goes to sleep; each morning the wheat has grown higher, but he does not know how. So it is that Jesus heals and refreshes us from within and slowly transforms us into Saints. In heaven we will know how many times we would have failed had not we received Communion that day or that week, how much darker our lives would have been without this Sacrament, how many of us would have lost the Faith if Jesus were not here with us.

So, on this great feast day, may the coldness of our hearts be transformed into hearts on fire with love and gratitude. May we worship this Sacrament with all our souls, minds, bodies, and strength, and receive it with contrite hearts filled with thanksgiving. I close as I began, with the words of St. Thomas Aquinas:

*Jesus, shepherd of the sheep, Thou thy flock in safety keep,  
Living bread, thy life supply, Strengthen us, or else we die,  
Fill us with celestial grace.  
Thou, who feedest us below: Source of all we have or know:  
Grant that with Thy Saints above, Sitting at the feast of love,  
We may see Thee face to face.  
Amen, alleluia.*