

CORPUS CHRISTI

Cibavit eos ex adipe frumenti. Alleluia! He fed them with finest wheat, Alleluia.

Beloved, with these opening words of today's introit we have returned to the joys and alleluias of the Paschal Mysteries. For today, with joy unbounded, the Church celebrates the Feast of Corpus Christi, a liturgical celebration of the real and substantial presence of Jesus Christ among us, bequeathed to His Mystical Bride, our Holy Mother the Church, during the Last Supper, the night before the Lord suffered for the world's redemption.

Because of the grave solemnity of Holy Week and the penetrating sorrow of Good Friday it is not possible to celebrate on Maundy Thursday the institution of the Mass and the abiding presence of Our Lord and Redeemer in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar with the unparalleled joy and splendor which Catholic faith would wish.

This liturgical festival owes its origin and universal appeal to the age of Catholic Faith, the High Middle Ages of 13th century Europe. First promoted by Blessed Julian of Cornillon it was raised to the status of a universal feast of the Roman Church by Pope Urban IV who commissioned one no less than Saint Thomas Aquinas to compose an Office and Mass for its celebration. From the texts and melodies of that genius of mystical and theological insight come all the Eucharistic hymns and antiphons with which Catholics are so familiar.

This festival owes its immense historical popularity to the magnificent procession of the Blessed Sacrament which ordinarily accompanies the Mass. Winding its way through the streets of the temporal city, the procession – as the Archbishop and faithful of Saint Louis will observe this afternoon from the great basilica on Lindell Avenue – gives public witness to the abiding presence of the Lord with His Church on earth and God's pledge for a place in glory for each who believes and acts on the truths which His Christ has revealed.

The Liturgical Sacrifice – and the Most Blessed Sacrament, the abiding presence of Christ constituting the Sacrament of that Sacrifice – is intimately bound to the life of Church. In truth all that faith seeks and does depends on it, and through it finds its expression and fulfillment. Through this Sacrifice and Sacrament Christ Himself is rendered present on the altars of the Church and the fullness of grace is imparted by God to the world here below. In this Sacrifice and Sacrament Christ offers to the Father through the Holy Spirit His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in an infinite and pleasing sacrifice of praise and glory. And through Holy Communion Jesus imparts Himself personally and intimately by sacramental means which, when received worthily by penitent Christians forgives sins, increases divine charity and gives us pledge for future glory.

In today's Gospel reading we have a prefiguring of this immense nourishment of souls through time and space. For Jesus came into this world for no other purpose than to communicate to men the divine life of the Most Holy Trinity – that ineffable Mystery to which this glorious Feast of the Incarnation is so intimately connected. Faced with the impossibility of

remaining in this world until the end of time, the Lord Jesus foresaw and provided through a marvelous, sacramental means, His perpetual presence among us. Not only would He not leave us orphans through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus deigned to leave Himself as well.

My flesh is meat indeed, my Blood is true drink. This is my Body and my Blood. He who eats my flesh and drinks my Blood abides in me and I in him. Such, indeed, is this Blessed Food come down from Heaven. It is not like the manna which your forefathers ate in the desert and are now dead. He who eats this bread – my flesh, I Who am the One, True and Living, God – he who eats this bread will live forever.

Beloved, what other god, what other religion offers such bountiful goodness as Christianity? Our Lord and God lies here, hidden under the outward signs of bread and wine, here in the Glorious, and Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar: Jesus crucified, Jesus Victim, Jesus . . . Host. This Jesus is God – He is the lover of our souls.

Beloved children, today you are to receive this wondrous God into your soul for the very first time. Never forget that the outward appearance of the bread of this Sacrament bears within its very being, hidden from our eyes but radiant to our Faith – it bears – for it **is – God Himself**.

This same God loves you and seeks you – to such an extent that He humbled Himself and came to us from inaccessible light in glory; He who is God humbled Himself to be subject to human parents and all the sorrows of this life only to die at the conspiracy of faithless priests. His love is simply prodigious. This Jesus, this God, is always waiting for you in this Sacrament. He is there, ever ready to pardon, ready to forgive, eager to love – if we would be humble our hearts to receive Him.

Beloved children of God, Jesus seeks to abide in your souls, in your hearts made simple and pure by His abiding grace. Seek Him, go to Him, pray to Him, love and adore Him, for He is our God: in Him alone can our restless hearts find lasting peace and consolation.

Small wonder then, the words of today's glorious Mass sequence:

Sion lift thy voice and sing,
Praise thy Savior and thy King
Praise Him with hymns, thy Shepard
true.
Strive thy best to praise Him well,
Yet doth He all praise excel,
None can ever reach His due.

And so it is that by God's prevenient designs we are the recipients of His abounding mercies. Through the perduring sign and effect of His Paschal Mysteries we are fed with a manna which exceeds in every way that by which our forefathers were fed in the desert. This new and eternal Bread come down from Heaven is our viaticum in this life and pledge of glory for the world to come. Let us, therefore, resolve to receive Our Lord worthily, with humility, ever open to His formation in truth and moral goodness. By living on the merit

of this heavenly food we have the Lord's own promise that it will bring us to the vision of God in the glory of heaven.

O God, Who in this wondrous Sacrament hath left unto us a memorial of Thy Passion, grant, we beseech Thee, so to venerate the Sacred Mysteries of Thy Body and Blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of Thy redemption. Amen. Alleluia!