

Solemnity of Corpus Christi, C – June 23, 2019 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 750 words

The sequence that we recite or sing for this great feast – the *Lauda Sion*, written by St. Thomas Aquinas – is particularly venerable and beloved; it reads like a compendium of the Church’s teaching on the Holy Eucharist. This teaching has been handed down to us from the very beginning, from Christ himself, through his apostles and their successors: as we heard St. Paul say in the second reading, “I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you...”. The Eucharist is our greatest treasure, a gift from Christ himself and of Christ himself. Thus the sequence said, “Bring him all the praise you know; he is more than you bestow; never can you reach his due”. In other words, even if we were to give our very lives in order to receive the Most Holy Eucharist, we would still receive far more than we gave.

We know that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life”.¹ It is the source: all that we are and believe as Christians flows from Christ’s sacrificial self-offering; he thus reconciles us to God and enables us to participate in his divine life. It is also the summit: a well-ordered Christian life is an upward ascent toward ever greater union with Christ. But I wonder if an outsider who came to our assembly would see that teaching reflected in how we worship. Do we act during Mass as if the Eucharist is our source and summit? Do we, as the sequence says, “Bring him all the praise you know”? What is our level of recollection and prayerfulness? How deep is our faith in the Real Presence? These are questions for each of us to consider thoughtfully. And, of course, we always have room for improvement.

I suspect that most priests have a special prayer they say when they elevate the host and the chalice at Holy Mass. The one I have always said since ordination when I raise the host is: “Lord Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament”. It is simple, and perhaps it is more of an acclamation than a prayer, but I recite it knowing that I need a deeper faith and that professing that faith repeatedly helps it grow. And I know that my prayer has been and will continue to be answered. What do you say when the priest raises the host and chalice? I will never forget the custom I witnessed in Mexico: the people say out loud “My Lord and my God” at the moments of the elevations. Would that each of us could gaze intently with faith at the host and chalice and say a prayer like that with deep conviction in our hearts!

Faith is the key to the understanding the Eucharist, and we profess that faith whenever we approach holy communion and say “Amen” to the minister’s acclamation: “The Body of Christ”; “The Blood of Christ”. Amen! When Jesus hung upon the cross, all that was visible was his humanity; his divinity was hidden. In the Eucharist, we cannot even see his humanity. He is fully “in hiding”, as the beautiful hymn, *Adoro te devote* (which we will sing after communion), teaches.² Faith takes us through the sacramental veil to the one who is really and truly there in his total reality. Every holy communion is an authentic encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. Adults and children alike, the learned and the simple, the great and the lowly can appreciate this, for faith is the key – not book-learning, not physical sight, but faith.

My prayer on this great feast is that our loving Savior might, until the day we die, preserve and deepen our faith in his Real Presence in the Most Blessed Sacrament; that he will rescue and help us to reach out to those who do not believe or whose faith is weak, as we prayed in the opening hymn;³ and that, after we die, the veil that now hides his Presence from us may be

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1324.

² “Godhead here in hiding.... On the cross thy Godhead made no sign to men; Here thy very manhood steals from human ken...”

³ Verse 3 of the hymn, “At That First Eucharist”: “We pray for those who wander from the fold; O bring them back, Good Shepherd of the sheep, Back to the faith which saints believed of old, back to the Church which still that faith does keep.”

lifted, and we may rejoice to see him face to face forever, together with all the saints in heaven. The Eucharist is the source and summit of who we are and what we do: may this fact be reflected in our worship, in our hearts, in our minds, in our very lives. Faith is the key. Lord Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament! My Lord and my God! Amen.