

HOMILY CORPUS CHRISTI

June 22, 2025

Today we celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi or the Body and Blood of Christ. I want to give you a little account of the history of the feast. In 1263, a German priest named Fr. Peter of Prague was making a pilgrimage to Rome. He was having a crisis of faith and found it difficult to believe that the bread and wine was actually the body and blood of Christ. One day on his way to Rome, he stopped and celebrated Mass at a local church. During the Eucharistic Prayer, blood started to seep from the consecrated host over his hands and onto the corporal, that small piece of white cloth that is at the center of the altar. After Mass, he went to the neighboring city of Orvieto, where Pope Urban IV was residing. He brought the blood stained corporal, which is still on display in the cathedral there today. One year later, the feast of Corpus Christi was instituted.

In 2001, I was in Orvieto for the feast of Corpus Christi. They have a huge outside procession there each year. There are narrow cobblestone streets that wind over the hills, and the people make mosaics all over the streets with flower pedals and seeds and all organic materials. There are all kinds of religious images, the face of Christ, the wheat and grapes, the host and the cup, many images, symbols and designs. The procession is led by the Eucharist in a monstrance under a canopy with incense. They also carry the altar stone with the corporal in a glass case all over the streets of Orvieto, walking over these mosaics. I had the privilege of being one of the seminarians to carry the relics. And they had microphones and speakers set up along the procession and sang hymns in Italian.

Gloria te, Christo Jesu, Glory to you Christ Jesus.

It is quite spectacular. And when the procession is finished, there is a huge celebration in the streets of Orvieto with food and music and games. All this to celebrate the great gift that the Eucharist is in our lives.

The words “this is my Body and this is my Blood” are probably the most important words ever spoken. The Catholic Church believes what Jesus said 2,000 years ago that the bread and wine actually become the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Eucharist there is no physical distance between us and Jesus. Receiving the Eucharist is a communal event. The priest is the only person that gives himself the Body and Blood of Christ, everyone else receives it from another person. We have one big procession up to the front of church to receive

the Eucharist, which must be consumed immediately. If you do not, the EME may stop you. We break up a large host at Mass and drink from a common cup that is symbolic of the fact that we are all joining together to receive the same body and blood of Jesus. We are all joined physically. For a short time, there was a company that was marketing a cellophane package with a host, a little sealed plastic cup of wine and a napkin, all separate and sterile. They did not understand the theology of the Eucharist. We also have the Sign of Peace before receiving the Eucharist. This is symbolic of being reconciled with everyone before receiving. We should really give a sign of peace to everyone here, but if we did that we would be here all day.

We keep the Blessed Sacrament on reserve in the church for two reasons. First of all so that we can bring the Eucharist to people who cannot come to church. If you are doing this you must use a pyx, these are available on the table in the gathering space. The individual will receive the Eucharist from another person. Secondly, we keep the Eucharist on reserve for adoration, or prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. There is something very special about praying before the Blessed Sacrament that I cannot really describe to you, you have to experience it. There are not a lot of rubrics surrounding adoration. Any form of quiet prayer is appropriate. We have Eucharist exposition and adoration in the chapel here after the 9:00 Mass until benediction. In exposition, we place the Eucharist in a little glass case called the luna, and that is placed in a monstrance. We have a beautiful monstrance donated by St. Dorothy Church and cleaned by our own Cindy Coleman. Benediction is at 5:30, and it is a special blessing with the Blessed Sacrament. If you have not experienced this, please come on Tuesday or stay for our 15 minutes of adoration on the weekend.

Just a word about the placement of the tabernacle. Before Vatican II, churches were designed to have the tabernacle in the sanctuary, and altar pieces were designed to accommodate. In Vatican II the theology was clarified that the tabernacle is not the center of attention during Mass, the altar and the celebration of the Mass is the centerpiece, so many churches built after Vatican II moved the tabernacle off to the side. Some churches moved it to a separate Eucharistic chapel. All of these placements are permissible. People have suggested that we move our tabernacle back into the sanctuary, and I have considered it, but that special place with the natural light shining into the tabernacle just seems to fit our church, so I decided not to move it. So, today on the feast of Corpus Christi, let us take some time to appreciate the great gift of the Eucharist.