

June 22, 2014 – Corpus Christi – Year A
The Body of Christ

[start the homily at the ambo]

Today we have the blessing of celebrating the marvelous feast of Corpus Christi.

Corpus Christi is simply an old Latin term that means: "The Body of Christ."

The long name for this day is "The Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ"

"Corpus Christi" is a simpler and shorter phrase to use.

So, turn to your neighbor and say:

"Neighbor!"

"Happy Corpus Christi!"

The Church has been celebrating this feast for 750 years, since the year 1264.

The feast was created by the Church to re-echo the events of Holy Thursday and the Last Supper, especially the major event that evening, that is, Jesus instituting the Holy Eucharist.

The feast is usually celebrated on the Thursday after Pentecost and can be celebrated on Sunday, like we are doing here today.

"Corpus Christi"?

The body of Christ?

Where is the body of Christ?

We know from Scriptures and our creeds that Jesus died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and is there now with the God the Father.

But we also know that "the Body of Christ" is more than the physical body of Jesus.

The feast of Corpus Christ has its roots in several places in the Bible. Let's look at four events in Scriptures, the four in today's Scripture readings, to get *several different* perspectives on Corpus Christi.

Our first reading contains the oldest event of those we have in today's readings.

It tells us about Moses and the Israelites wandering in the desert after they escaped from the Egyptians.

They grew very hungry in the desert since so little was available to eat. When they complained to God, God offered them quails for meat and manna, a form of bread flakes, on the ground.

They collected manna every day.

It certainly was a great way for them to recognize how dependent they were on God, day in and day out.

However, as much as they were dependent on manna for food, Moses lets them know in no uncertain terms,

The Lord fed you with manna "in order to show you that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord."

And so, every Sunday we come here and listen as we read four Scripture readings from here at the ambo, the table of the word.

Yes, we need to be nourished by the Word of the Lord,
 the words of Sacred Scripture,
 comforting words and challenging words,
 words that effect us differently each time we hear them.

[Move to location of the stalks of wheat at the podium]

Today's second oldest Scripture story is King David's Psalm 147, a song of celebration and joy.

It fits the temperament of a day like today.

Especially fitting is the line:

"With the *best of wheat* he fills you."

Late in the 20th century a composer put those words to song so poetically.

"You satisfy the hungry heart

With gift of *finest wheat*.

Come give to us, O saving Lord,

The bread of life to eat."

God always provides us with the very best.

He provides the sun, the rain, and the soil to grow the finest wheat.

Then he provides us the greatest gift, his Son, Jesus!

[Move to altar]

The next oldest event we heard today was the Gospel from John.

Jesus' words in the Gospel take us here to the altar.

In the lines just before today's Gospel selection Jesus tells the people that their "ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die."

Then Jesus starts today's reading with the startling words: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread *[touching the altar]* will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

"Startling" words?

Good grief! Some of the people listening to Jesus were puzzled and even scandalized.

What kind of crazy stuff is he talking about?

Those words of Jesus were so hard for the people to understand and believe!

So new! So radical!

They did not have two thousand years, like we do,
 to unravel the new and mysterious concepts.
 Even today, 2000 years later, people ponder and struggle to understand.

And what do we understand today?

And what is still mystery for us?

We easily recognize this as a memorial, a remembrance of Jesus' actions at the Last Supper.

We see the bread and wine as symbolic of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Even more profoundly, we believe in Christ's real presence under the appearances of bread and wine.

So when we receive Communion and hear those words: "The Body of Christ" we humbly bow and reply, "Amen."

If there is ever a time to think "OMG - Oh, my God!" it would be so true after we have received Christ in the Eucharist.

It is a great time to say:

- "Lord, how you have blessed me time and time again."
- "Lord, thank you from the very depths of my soul!"

[Move to center aisle]

We have one more reading, the latest of the four Biblical events.

St. Paul reflects on the experience of the early church community in Corinth, about 33 years after the death of Jesus.

St. Paul gives yet another great insight into the "Body of Christ".

"The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

Oh! We are the body of Christ.

We are the group that prayed together and chose the name of Corpus Christi as the new name for the new parish made from St. Eugene, Immaculate Heart of Mary and St. Gerard.

We join together at the Eucharist with our many different gifts and talents.

We come from our many different places - 18 different countries.

BUT ... We are one! --- We are unified! --- We are Corpus Christi!

Yes, we ...

- fed by God
- fed with the very finest
- remembering the Last Supper
- seeing Christ's symbolic presence
- believing in Christ's real presence
- Christ's presence in word, in the Eucharist and in us!