

The Solemnity of Corpus et Sanguis Christi  
Solemnities in Ordinary Time, Cycle C  
June 5-6, 2010

*“The Body and Blood of Christ”*

The prayer of Mechizedek, presented to us in the Book of Genesis is a statement of gratitude. It's a statement we all need to make. Gratitude makes us complete human beings. It is gratitude to God and to our neighbor that underlies the kind of people Christians are and the kind of worship we practice; grateful people, grateful worship.

Jesus, in the holy gospel, performs a Messianic Miracle, the multiplication of the five loaves and two fish. It was said that the Messiah would feed His believers. He did. And this miracle made everybody grateful.

To explain: The divine compassion, the divine generosity of Jesus moved others to be grateful. You can imagine the attitudes of those hungry people. A gift is given and in gratefulness the gift is spread. “Here, let me help spread this gift because I

am grateful to have received it from Jesus. Have some,” they might have said to each other. People were so moved by all this gratefulness that twelve baskets of food remained. That means there was a “lot” of gratefulness going around as recorded in the gospel of Luke.

And that’s the secret of the Eucharist; there is so much gratitude/gratefulness in the Eucharist that we become inspired and unified as one Body in our commitment to share gratefully the gifts we have been given. All are a grateful Body of Christ, Corpus Christi.

Now, the institution of this feast has roots in Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday, Thursday of Holy Week. That’s what St. Paul is telling us in the Epistle, First Corinthians. In 1264 the original celebration of Corpus Christi was observed on Thursday after Trinity Sunday, nine weeks after Holy Thursday. It’s a way to recall the institution of the Eucharist with some relief and distance from the

pending doom of the crucifixion that happened on Good Friday.

In great part, the feast of Corpus Christi which recalls the institution of the Eucharist is due to St. Juliana of Liege. Having had a vision she dedicated her entire life to establish the feast. She made her religious profession in 1206 and in 1230 became the Superior of her Order but was run out by her sisters because of her too devout practices toward the Eucharist. She became friends with James Pantaleon, an important pastor in Liege and who later became Pope Urban IV. In 1246 the church leaders of Liege proclaimed the feast, but the bishop there died and St. Juliana was again exiled. She died in 1258 still in exile and was thought to be too eccentric about the Eucharist. But her friend vindicated her holiness and her vision to celebrate a feast dedicated to the Body of Christ. That friend was James Pantaleon Pope Urban IV who

established the feast in 1264 and became universally accepted and celebrated by 1300.

St. Thomas Aquinas who was a contemporary of St. Juliana (1225-1274) seems to have contributed a number of Eucharistic hymns or improved on existing ones. In 1970 our Roman Missal augmented the title to include the Precious Blood. Hence, we have the feast name: *“The Body and Blood of Christ.”*

The fact remains, though, that we are a body of grateful people, the Body of Christ, because Christ was grateful enough to make us members of Himself, through the grateful giving of His Body and Blood for our salvation and for the unification of all humankind. As one with Christ we become a perfect offering, a grateful offering to the Father. In turn we are grateful to include all humanity in our expression of thanks to Almighty God; that expression is the Eucharist; the Body of Christ, which we offer in the next step of this Mass.

I conclude with some ancient but ever timely words, taken from Eucharistic Hymns known by St. Juliana, improved by St. Thomas Aquinas and still sung today. These hymns celebrate the mystery and reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist and in each other.

*“Come adore this wondrous presence,  
bow to Christ the source of grace. Here  
is kept the ancient promise, of God’s  
earthly dwelling place. Sight is blind  
before God’s glory. Faith Alone may see  
His (Eucharistic) face.”* Tatum Ergo)

or

*Humbly let us voice our homage for so  
great a sacrament. Let all former rites  
surrender to the Lord’s New Testament.  
What our sense fail to fathom, let us  
grasp through faith’s consent.”* (Tatum Ergo)

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and

*“We adore you Christ the living Bread . . .  
veiled in outward sign; yet deeper reality  
beyond the bread, You are there . . . You  
become one in us and we are one in You  
. . . What my body and soul desires, deny  
not to me, union with you and neighbor,  
threaded together through mystery.  
Mystical Body, You and I, and we for all  
eternity.” Amen. (Adorate Devote)*

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