

Fr. Francis Maple – Pantasaph Friary

CORPUS CHRISTI

“I HAVE LONGED TO HAVE THIS MEAL WITH YOU.”

A man once asked me, “What do Catholics believe about the Holy Eucharist?” I replied, “We believe that in what looks like a wafer of bread is the Risen Christ. To the eye it looks like bread, tastes like bread, feels like bread. But when I hold the wafer of bread between my fingers and thumbs at Mass and say over it, “This is my Body”, we Catholics believe that the Risen Lord’s Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity is truly present. The substance of bread is changed from bread into the Risen Lord. It is in fact the greatest miracle that takes place every day in our Catholic churches. That is what we Catholics believe about the Holy Eucharist.” The man then said, “If I was a Catholic, and I believed that, I would never get off my knees adoring Jesus.” His reply gives us Catholics much food for thought. How strong is our belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist?

I remember when I was a parish priest speaking at a Parish Council Meeting and trying to persuade the council members to help me initiate perpetual adoration in the parish, that is, adoration 24 hours a day. They all agreed it was an excellent idea, but some thought it was not a very practical one. I could appreciate their point because we were a small and elderly parish. I thought I wasn’t going to let this idea die. I would take it to the priests of the deanery. There were twelve parishes in our deanery and perhaps some of their parishioners may be interested in helping our parish to have perpetual adoration. Sadly, it was not to be. They too agreed it was an excellent idea, but for security reasons they could not support it. I personally think we missed a wonderful opportunity of showing Our Lord how much we loved Him, and how much we wanted to thank Him for His generosity being with us every second of every day.

It is sad that because of vandalism and lack of respect we are unable to leave our churches open night and day. Just think if they were left open what a message it would send out to the world. Some people, of course, would think we were fanatics.

Perhaps Jesus is a fanatic in leaving Himself with us all the time as a Prisoner in the Tabernacle. Others, would have to admit what strong beliefs we have. It would make others inquire what’s it all about and perhaps when they realise what it is all about would want to join us. I think it would certainly bring an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. It would certainly tell Jesus one thing, how much we Catholics appreciate what He did for us. How did Jesus begin His Last Supper? He sat down at table with His twelve Apostles and said, “I have longed to have this meal with you.” Remember who is speaking – God – not just our favourite celebrity. What He says He means. Today is the feast of Corpus Christi and we have to ask ourselves what response do we, as a person and as a parish, give to such eagerness on the part of Jesus. We should all try to receive Him not just on Sundays, but as often as we can, and even every day. When we approach Holy Communion, we should prepare our hearts to be as worthy as possible to receive Him. If we don’t receive Our Lord in Holy Communion as often as we can, I think one of the greatest regrets we shall have when we get to Heaven will be, “Jesus, I now appreciate how wonderful you are. How sad, how cold, how foolish I was. I had the opportunity to receive you so often even every day in Holy Communion and I didn’t.” Don’t wait until you get to Heaven to appreciate the Real Presence. Appreciate Jesus now. I always regard those who go to Mass and Holy Communion every day, or as often as they possibly can, as His special friends. It is He who gives them this special love and grace.

An Italian lady once told how her father used to make homemade wine for their annual family celebrations. The members around the table would sip the wine and compliment him on its good quality. He would smile showing his appreciation. He was happy that his family appreciated both him and his labour. Eventually he died, leaving many of his unopened bottles in the wine cellar. Now when the family gathers for anniversaries and holidays, they continue

to share a bottle of their father's wine. It helps them to remember the good times of the past. In the wine they sense his presence as still being with them.

The Holy Eucharist is something like that, but much more. It is the Real Presence of the Risen Lord abiding with His people in His glorified Body. It's His unique way to be with us always. Corpus Christi evokes memories from the Upper Room, the multiplication of the loaves, the manna in the desert and more. It's a memorial of the past. Corpus Christi speaks to the present. Jesus said, "I am the Living Bread." That is, right now, today. Through our reception of the Living Bread, we are being strengthened this very moment. Corpus Christi carries a future promise, an everlasting pledge of future glory for Jesus said, "Anyone who eats this Bread will live forever."

Lord Jesus, when we come to receive You in Holy Communion let our first words be, "Thank You, Father, for giving me Your Son. Jesus, I love You and thank You for all You have done for me." There is no better way to start our thanksgiving. May we all receive through the Holy Spirit the grace to be drawn nearer to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

MAY WE TRULY APPRECIATE THE PRESENCE OF JESUS

I remember vividly the day I went to Buckingham Palace to receive the MBE for services rendered to charity. You ask anyone who has also received an honour from the Queen how they felt about it. They will all tell you it was a very special day in their life. They were overawed at the pageantry and they knew it was an experience that would never happen again in their life. You are given instructions telling you how to behave and how to address the Queen. We were told the Queen will ask you just two questions after she had pinned the medal on your clothing. Then she will hold out her hand for a handshake. That is the signal for you to leave. Then you two steps backwards, bow and exit. Foolish me I forget the two steps backwards. I just cleared off after the handshake. Afterwards I thought if it had been Henry VIII, I would have either have been locked up in the Tower of London or had my head chopped off!

Today is the feast of Corpus Christi and it gives us an opportunity to examine what reverence we show our Lord Jesus in church when we receive Him in Holy Communion.

As a priest I have observed a lot of irreverence in church. From the moment some enter church they are talking. You would never think they are entering God's home. Certainly, it appears they are not aware of Jesus' presence in the Church. I have observed people even sharing some humour as they line up to receive Holy Communion. They forget where they are. Just a few moments ago in the church they witnessed the greatest miracle taking place when bread and wine were changed into the risen Lord. In all certainty you can say the people at an investiture show more reverence in Buckingham Palace in the presence of the Queen than some Catholics show to the Lord in His Church.

Worst of all are those who receive Holy Communion in a state of grave sin. St. Paul has written some very strong words about them. "He who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to themselves." Though Our dear Saviour still loves us, in fact, He never stops loving us, He cannot bear to be in the company of serious sin. Jesus is very serious when He told one saint "There is no punishment severe enough by which I can chastise a soul that receives Me unworthily." Very frightening words coming from the lips of the One Who is love Itself. Receiving Jesus in a state of sin is the worst sin a person can commit, a sacrilege, drawing the all pure God into a soul infested with a serious unconfessed sin. If we have committed a grave sin, we must always first go to Confession to confess it before we receive Jesus in Holy Communion.

When Jesus left this earth to ascend to His Father, He wanted to leave Himself with us in the Holy Eucharist and how shabbily we treat Him. At the Last Supper His very words to us were, "I have longed to have this meal with you." From all eternity He had planned to give Himself to us to be the food of our souls, so that we could become like Him, and He could remain with us forever and what return do we give Him? Coldness and ingratitude.

This was His supreme gift to us and there are many who by their attitude could not care less for what He has done for us. Every time before we receive Him in Holy Communion we should be longing and excited to know that we are so close to Him. The moment we receive Jesus should be the most precious moment of our day. We should be living just to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. We should love Him so much that we want Him to be always on our mind.

What should be, as He intended, a gem of infinite value, whereby we can enrich ourselves beyond all measure, here in time, in preparation for an indescribable never-ending bliss in heaven, is becoming less and less appreciated, even treated with indifference.

Whenever we receive Jesus in Holy Communion there are three words He loves to hear us say. They are 'I love You'. He once told a saint people ask Me for so many things when they receive Me. I want to hear these things but most of all I want to hear them say 'I love You.'

Lord Jesus, may we all receive You into our hearts at Holy Communion with the utmost respect and ecstatic love! May we appreciate Your presence in the Blessed Sacrament and want to spend as much time as we can with You. Even go so far as feeling that we have to drag ourselves away from You whenever we visit Him in the Blessed Sacrament.