

Solemn Procession and Benediction of the Most Holy Eucharist
Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*
St. Patrick Church, Decatur, Illinois
June 26, 2011

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Reverend Fathers, Deacons, Consecrated Religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

On this Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, the Body and Blood of Christ, we join with Catholics all over the world in the ancient tradition of carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession through the public streets as a sign of our common faith, devotion and adoration of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist, but also as a witness to the fact that Christ is also present in our world. He does not remain hidden in the tabernacles of our churches, but comes into our lives, into our very hearts and souls, each time we receive Him in the Eucharist. As Moses reminded the people to remember the Lord and all the marvelous deeds He did for them in leading them out of slavery in Egypt, as we go out into the world we are to remember the Lord and give thanks for all that He has done for us in leading us out of slavery to sin and into the promise of eternal life, which He promises through the gift

of His Body and Blood. We are to make Him manifest in the world through our lives, our faith and our good works.

The digital age of our contemporary world is having a profound effect on our culture, in ways we do not yet fully understand. Social networking, where people publish details and pictures of their lives on the internet, means that many of us live more publicly than ever before. Tweeting, where people send short messages from mobile phones or computers about what they are doing at any particular time, is like distributing a diary to family, friends and others. Bloggers share their thoughts on a variety of interests and put them where anyone can see. Digital photos can be stored, shared, posted and downloaded.

But what happens, in this electronic world, when people mess up? When there are embarrassing stories, photos or movies about them on the internet? Or if stories appear about people that can harm them, whether they are true or not? The internet means people's past can be ever-present, they are not allowed to forget, not able to move on from where they were. For better or for worse, new technology keeps us from forgetting, but some things should be forgotten, while others must be remembered.

Today we keep a memory: not one that will harm us or prevent our growth, but one that gives us life and promises eternal life. It is not a memory in the sense that it reminds us of long ago – it is rather a memory that makes the past present. The self-giving of Jesus in his life and ministry, at the Last Supper, on the cross and in his Holy Spirit is as present to us as it was to the first disciples.

Today's feast celebrates the presence of Jesus in the mystery of the Eucharist, his presence among us under the appearance of bread and wine. How is it possible, nearly two thousand years after his death, that he is with us in this way? How do we know it is him?

When Jesus rose from the dead, he was the same as before, but different. He could still talk, eat, walk, teach and work miracles; but now he could appear to his disciples who were cowering in a locked room; now he would hand his mission on to them; now he would ascend to his Father, and give them his Holy Spirit. It is this risen Lord, unconstrained by the ordinary laws of nature, who is present in the Eucharist, to nourish and save his people.

If we do not immediately recognise him, we are in good company: Mary thought he was the gardener, early in the morning on the first day of

the week; the disciples thought he was a ghost, until he ate a piece of grilled fish; the travellers on the road to Emmaus thought he was a well-informed stranger. It is here in this last story that we have a clue as to how we will recognise him. We study the prophecies about him; we listen to his teachings about his death and resurrection; we ponder the Last Supper when he says, "this is my body" and "this is my blood"; and we hear his words today in St John's Gospel where he tells us we are to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man - himself. Putting all this together, when we celebrate the Eucharist in his memory, we can recognise that he is truly with us, and we worship and rejoice. Our faith helps us to see what our eyes alone cannot.

Knowing he is so close to us in the Eucharist gives a focus to our lives that is both here and now and in the future; both tangible, appearing as bread and wine, and intangible - this is no ordinary bread and wine but the flesh and blood of the Lord, the risen Lord. This is for us comfort, consolation, hope of eternal life, a constant call to be united with each other, a challenge to be worthy of his presence, an invitation to share with others the news that he is very close.

The God who saved the chosen people in the desert is still saving, through Jesus Christ his Son. The risen Lord who appeared to Saul and called him to be an apostle is making himself known to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and inviting us to go out in his name. As we ponder this great mystery today, we can realise how life-transforming it can be, and how it can transform our world. This is a memory we hold, we share and we celebrate - today, on this feast, in this procession and every time we gather around the altar in His name.

May God give us this grace. Amen.