

Homily for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
Corpus Christi
June 22, 2014

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield

† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Our Mass today celebrates a number of milestones: we mark the 175th anniversary of the parish community from its roots as Old St. Mary's to the present Cathedral parish, the 125th anniversary of Catholic education in our parish's schools, the 85th anniversary of the present Cathedral Church and School, and the fourth anniversary of my installation as Bishop of Springfield in Illinois. We give thanks to God for the gifts and graces received over these years and pray for continued blessings in the years to come.

Our liturgy today is that of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, traditionally known by its Latin name of *Corpus Christi*. Our Sacred Scriptures today remind us of God's presence in our lives and invite us into deeper relationship with Jesus. The Lord's words spoken to the crowds two thousand years ago that we heard at the beginning of the

passage from the Gospel of Saint John that has just been read to us by the deacon remain valid for us today: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (John 6:51). These words of Jesus are fulfilled for us in the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist each time we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and receive our Lord into our hearts in Holy Communion.

In conjunction with our celebration of *Corpus Christi* and the anniversaries that I noted at the outset, I am pleased to have written and officially promulgate today my first Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois called *Ars celebrandi et adorandi*, “On the Art of Celebrating the Eucharistic Liturgy Properly and Adoring the Lord in the Eucharist Devoutly.” I pray that this Pastoral Letter will be widely read and faithfully implemented, so that our celebrations of the liturgy may “be imbued with reverence, adoration and the glorification of God” and in this way recognize the Eucharist as, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, “the source and summit of all the Christian life.”¹

Growth in the Church is fostered through beauty in the liturgy. The command of Our Lord to increase the number of His followers everywhere is clear when He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The beauty of our church edifices, magnificent works of religious art and the graceful celebration of the liturgy, accompanied by harmonious music, inspiring homilies and the active participation of the faithful, are the foundational elements that attract people to the liturgy. The great Pope Saint John Paul II also called our attention to the *ars celebrandi* in his Encyclical letter on the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, in which he said: "No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands: it is too great for anyone to feel free to treat it lightly and with disregard for its sacredness and its universality."²

In my Pastoral Letter I call attention to prayerful adoration of the Eucharist "reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, conspicuous, worthily decorated, and suitable for prayer."³ Regularly scheduled times for exposition of the Most Holy Eucharist are highly commended as ways to stimulate the faithful to spiritual union with Christ, which culminates in sacramental communion. By reverently bending the knee in genuflection before the Blessed

Sacrament, we not only pay proper respect to the Lord, but we also remind ourselves in whose presence we are.

I highly encourage and give permission for pastors to conduct processions with the Blessed Sacrament through the public streets, especially on the solemnity of the Body and the Blood of Christ, as a witness to our faith in the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist and as an expression of our belief that God is in our midst even in our everyday lives. We will have such a procession today beginning immediately at the end of Mass right after we have received Holy Communion. Carrying Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and in our hearts, we will bring a public witness of the love of Jesus into the streets, into the city of Springfield, and into the world of our everyday lives.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke eloquently about the meaning of the *Corpus Christi* procession for contemporary Catholics in his homilies for the feast. The procession is a profession of faith: the Solemnity of Corpus Christi developed at a time when Catholics were both affirming and defining their faith “in Jesus Christ, alive and truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist,” and the procession is a public statement of that belief. The sacrament of the Lord’s Body and Blood always “goes above and beyond

the walls of our churches.” The procession blurs the separation between what we do inside the church, and what we do outside: we immerse Christ, so to speak, “in the daily routine of our lives, so that he may walk where we walk and live where we live.” Pope Benedict declared, “The procession represents an immense and public blessing for our city.”⁴

It is fitting that our celebration of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ and our *Corpus Christi* procession occur today at the beginning of the Fortnight for Freedom, the two-week period promoted by the Bishops of the United States to call attention to the need to protect the religious liberty given to all people by God and codified in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. Our public procession with the Blessed Sacrament is a declaration that our freedom of religion cannot be confined to a private “freedom of worship,” as the secularists would like to interpret the First Amendment. Our Catholic faith calls us to put our faith into practice and our dismissal at the end of Mass sends us to go forth and glorify the Lord by the lives we live in the world during the rest of the week.

As you receive Holy Communion today and participate in our *Corpus Christi* procession, remember the elegant and simple words of Saint Augustine regarding our reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus: “If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive.”⁵ What we receive is Christ who himself is God, and as St. John tells us: “God is love” (1 John 4:8). What we therefore become in receiving the Eucharist well is love, a love which is meant to be shared with others in imitation of Him whom we receive. By letting the love of God, received in the Eucharist, flow through us in our care for others, we provide a light for others to see.

As we seek to pay fitting homage to our Eucharistic King through the devoted and careful celebration of the Holy Mass, may we come to an ever greater realization that the law of the heart is love.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

² Pope Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 52.

³ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 314.

⁴ See Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Thursday, 7 June 2007, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070607_corpus-christi_en.html, and Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Thursday, May 26, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050526_corpus-domini_en.html.

⁵ St. Augustine, *Easter Sermon* 227.