

**Mass for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
Sunday, May 29, 2016**

**Our Saviour Catholic Church
Jacksonville, IL**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here to celebrate this Mass on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, a feast in which the Church throughout the world renews her devotion to the greatest gift that the Lord has left us, His Body and Blood, truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. We come to the altar today to renew our appreciation and love for this gift, a love that we will then profess to this community as we carry this gift in procession at the conclusion of this Mass.

When the Church celebrates special solemnities such as this, she does so for a particular reason. Many of these feasts have come about in response to circumstances in the world and the Church at the time of their introduction, and this feast is no different. In 1263, a priest from Germany by the name of Peter was traveling through Italy on his way to Rome. Peter stopped to celebrate Mass in the small town of Bolsena. He had been

struggling with his faith; in particular, he had been questioning the Church's teaching that Christ is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the Eucharist. As he said the words of consecration at the Mass, the host began to bleed, dripping onto his fingers and onto the corporal that lay on the altar.

Alarmed at this, Peter stopped the Mass and he asked to be brought to the nearby town of Orvieto where the pope at the time, Pope Urban IV, was staying. After an investigation, it was determined that the miracle was indeed true, and the pope ordered that the relics be brought to the Cathedral there in Orvieto. To this day, the blood-stained corporal is enshrined there and can be worshipped by the faithful who visit the church.

"It is said that Pope Urban IV was prompted by this miracle to commission St. Thomas Aquinas to compose the Proper for a Mass and an Office honoring the Holy Eucharist as the Body of Christ. One year after the miracle, in August of 1264, Pope Urban IV introduced the saint's composition, *O Salutaris Hostia*, which we still sing today during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and by means of a papal bull instituted the feast of Corpus Christi."¹

Just over a month ago, another possible Eucharistic miracle was reported in Poland. It happened after a consecrated host had been dropped on the ground during the distribution of Holy Communion at a Mass on Christmas Day. The host was placed in a container of water in the sacristy, as is the practice when this happens. Shortly thereafter, it was noticed that red stains were present on the host. The bishop of the diocese then commissioned an investigation that involved scientific testing of the host.

“The final medical statement by the Department of Forensic Medicine found: ‘In the histopathological image, the fragments were found containing the fragmented parts of the cross striated muscle. It is most similar to the heart muscle.’ Tests also determined the tissue to be of human origin, and found that it bore signs of distress.”² The bishop declared that the case bore the hallmarks of a Eucharistic miracle and it was sent to the Holy See for further investigation.

These are two of the many Eucharistic miracles that have been witnessed throughout the history of the Church. These miracles do not happen for our entertainment. Rather, they, along with all miracles, take place to strengthen our faith and show the remarkable power of God and

His love for His people. It seems fitting that the Lord should work so many miracles around the Eucharist, as it is His greatest gift to us and one into which we are always encouraged to delve more deeply with our devotion.

The readings for today's Mass paint the picture of how the Eucharist has come to be an integral part of our Catholic faith. In the very first book of the Bible, we hear how God is preparing for this great gift. The figure of Melchizedek, King of Salem, mysteriously enters the scene and appears to Abraham. This episode, seemingly small, is extremely important. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains the connection in this way:

The Christian tradition considers Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High," as a prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ, the unique "high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:10; cf. 6:20; Gen 14:18) "holy, blameless, unstained," (Heb 7:26) "by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified," (Heb 10:14) that is, by the unique sacrifice of the cross.³

The scene also mentions that Melchizedek offered bread and wine. Bread and wine were traditionally used in Old Testament sacrifices. These two elements were mentioned later in the Book of Exodus in connection

with the Passover which was at the heart of the identity of the Jewish people. Jesus takes these elements of bread and wine and gives them a new and definitive meaning by uniting them to the New Passover event of His death on the Cross to free us from the slavery of sin and to lead us to the new Promised Land of Heaven.⁴

The Gospel passage that we just heard provides us with another element of our belief in the Eucharist. "The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves, when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist."⁵ This is a sign that the Eucharist will continue to provide spiritual nourishment for every member of the Church until the Lord returns in glory at the end of time.

Because the Eucharist is something that we encounter every week, and for some, every day, it is possible to become a little complacent. This is, of course, not due to anything that is lacking in the gift, for "in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself."⁶ In other words, if our experience of Mass and being in the presence of the Eucharist does not stir our hearts to love for Him and His Church, where we need to look for a remedy is in the mirror.

Because of the importance of this gift to our spiritual life, it is worth our doing a sort of examination of conscience with regard to how we approach the Eucharist. The Feast of Corpus Christi is a perfect time to make this examination as we focus with great intensity on the Eucharist in the Mass and the procession that follows. While several points can be considered, I would like briefly to mention three.

The first point of examination is our commitment to making the Eucharist what the Church calls the “source and summit” of our lives. Can we say that is true for us? Have we placed our going to Mass each Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation as our highest priority?

As many of you know, when I come to a parish to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, I ask the students to fill out questionnaires so that I can get to know a little more about them. One of the questions that I ask is how they plan to live out their Confirmation commitment. Every so often, I will get an answer which says that the candidate plans to go to Mass *almost* every Sunday. Or they say that they will *try* to make it to Mass on Sunday.

I always take the opportunity to stop and make a comment on those answers. I remind them that the obligation to go to Mass on Sunday is not

one that I have invented. Rather, God makes this expectation clear when He commands us to “keep holy the Sabbath.”⁷ I also refer to a scene from one of the *Star Wars* movies where the Jedi Master Yoda is teaching Luke Skywalker how to make use of the force. Luke’s X-wing fighter ship is buried in the swamp and Yoda encourages Luke to use the force to raise it out of the water. Luke tells Yoda that he will give it a try, to which Yoda responds: “No! Try not! Do, or do not. There is no try.” We cannot be content just to *try* to get to Mass, we need to order the priorities of our life in such a way that nothing gets in the way of our getting to Mass, with the exception of extreme illness, physical inability, or absolute unavailability of Mass.

The way to be motivated to do this is not to look at this from a negative perspective, such as worrying about a punishment for not getting to Mass. If we truly appreciate Who it is that we receive in the Eucharist and the great spiritual benefits that gift bestows on us, we will not want to miss out on this wonderful blessing for anything.

The second point for examination is our participation when we *do* come to Mass. There’s an old saying that goes something like this: “You only get out of something what you put into it.” Take, for example,

exercise. If we don't put much effort into getting and staying in shape, then we won't derive much benefit from our exercise. The same is somewhat true with our participation in the Mass. I say that is 'somewhat true' because it is a truth of our Catholic faith that Jesus truly becomes present at every Mass, regardless of how much we put into our participation. Likewise, even if we are not putting forth much effort, as long as we are in the state of grace, we receive that gift of God's Body and Blood into our soul when we receive Holy Communion. What can be affected by our participation or lack thereof is our openness to receiving the benefits of the Eucharist and having them make a lasting impact on our lives.

In a society in which we depend so much on being consumers of entertainment, we can easily bring that attitude to Mass. We can tend to sit back and wait for something inspiring or moving to touch us, but until that happens, we just sit back as passive observers. We need to resist those temptations and throw ourselves into the mystery being celebrated. While we want to have beautiful liturgies and inspiring homilies, we can't rely just on that to carry us through. We need to make a commitment to a fully conscious and active participation in the Mass.⁸

If we focus on quieting our hearts from distractions before Mass begins, listening attentively to the readings and the homily, and responding with purpose and conviction to the prayers, responses, and music at Mass, our experience of Mass and our reception of the Eucharist can be quite powerful. Again, our motivation is a positive one in that we want to prepare ourselves to be as open as possible to the gifts and graces that we will receive in this gift, and actively participating is one of the most helpful ways of achieving this.

The third point of examination is our bodily posture with regards to the Eucharist. I mentioned this point in my first Pastoral Letter, *Ars celebrandi et adorandi*, released two years ago on the Feast of Corpus Christi. I spoke about the physical gesture of genuflection and how it is a sign of profound reverence and humility before the Lord who is truly present before us in the tabernacle.

To genuflect means, literally, “to bend the knee.” In the ancient world the knee symbolized the strength of a man. If a man is struck in the knee, he stumbles and falls; his strength is taken from him. When we genuflect before the Lord, our strength is not taken from us; rather, we willingly bend our strength to the Lord and place ourselves humbly in his service.

When we bend our knee to the Lord of heaven and earth we should hear the words of the Psalmist ever in our hearts, “Lord, I am your servant,” remembering that before the Lord every knee must bend (Psalm 116:16; cf. Philippians 2:10).⁹

As with the other two points, our motivation to renew our attentiveness to this practice is positive in that it flows from a deep awareness that Christ is truly present in the flesh, and in our flesh, that is our body, we want to offer a sign of our love and adoration to Him through a genuflection, or with a profound bow, but only when we are physically unable to genuflect.

In this regard, I recently heard of a story about Pope St. John Paul II that I would like to share:

In 2004 St John Paul II led his last Corpus Christi procession. He could no longer walk. Archbishop Marini and Monsignor Konrad Krajewski helped place the Pope on a platform of a specially prepared car. In front of him was the monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament. Monsignor Krajewski explains: “We went down the *Via Merulana* towards the Basilica of Saint Mary Major. At some point, the Pope gave a sign to me to come closer. He said in Polish: ‘I want

to kneel down.’ I was so surprised by this request that I didn’t know what to say. I realized that it was physically impossible. With great delicacy, and a trembling voice, I explained that the car shook and that it would be very difficult to kneel. In response, I heard a disapproving sound well-known to me: ‘Mmm’. A little further, the Pope repeated again: ‘I want to kneel down.’ I said shyly that it was better to wait a little longer, as we were getting closer to the basilica. And again I heard the familiar: ‘Mmm’. When we passed the church of the Redemptorists, he said firmly and loudly: ‘Here is Christ, Please!’”¹⁰

This holy saint truly believed that Christ is present in the Eucharist, and we can ask for his special intercession that we might examine how we approach this great gift in our lives. May our hearts be enflamed with the great love that Jesus gives us in the Eucharist, and may our lives reflect our desire to be drawn deeper into that mystery each time we come to Mass though our total giving of ourselves to Him who has given all of Himself to us in this most blessed of all gifts.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Joan Carroll Cruz, *Eucharistic Miracles*, www.therealpresence.org.

² Catholic News Agency, *Check out this Eucharistic miracle in Poland*, April 18, 2016.

³ CCC, §1544.

⁴ CCC, §1334.

⁵ CCC, §1335.

⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, §11.

⁷ Exodus 20-8-11.

⁸ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §14.

⁹ *Ars celebrandi et adorandi*, §30.

¹⁰ Rev. George Boronat, *iPray with the Gospel – Ordinary Time II*, 20.