

**Homily for Corpus Christi Mass and Procession
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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

My dear priests, deacons, and brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are together here to celebrate this Mass today on the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. The observance of this Solemnity goes back to the thirteenth century, when Pope Urban IV instituted it in 1264 for the whole Church. The meaning of this feast is to promote consideration of and devotion to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, a central tenet of our faith that unfortunately is not understood or accepted by more than two-thirds of Catholics, if recent polls are accurate.

According to the Pew Research Center, 69% of Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist,¹ while the Gallup Poll reports that 61% of Catholics do not go to church on Sunday.² The Pew Research Center also reports that 67% of Catholics say that President Biden should be allowed to receive Holy Communion,³ despite his aggressive pro-abortion stance and support for same-sex marriage and transgenderism, which are all

clearly contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church. I do not think it is a mere coincidence that there is a close correlation of about two-thirds of Catholics for these three matters. After all, if you do not believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist, why bother going to church every Sunday, and what does it matter who receives Holy Communion if it is only a symbolic reminder of the Last Supper or a congenial meal of spiritual fellowship?

Recently I have spoken and written on the theme of “Eucharistic Coherence,” a phrase drawn from the Aparecida document, which, then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, played a large role in promulgating throughout the Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean back in 2007. It was a declaration that called all of Latin America back to a full-hearted living out of the Gospel, and our Holy Father seems to still have much of it in his heart now as Pope Francis. That document uses this profound phrase — “Eucharistic Coherence” — to refer to the necessary consistency that must be evident between a Catholic’s life, and the Blessed Sacrament that they receive at Mass. It aims to protect the Eucharist from desecration, but it also aims to protect the life of grace of

those Catholics receiving the Eucharist, for, as St. Paul reminds the earliest Christians, *“Whoever eats unworthily of the bread and drinks from the Lord’s cup makes himself guilty of profaning the body and of the blood of the Lord”* (1 Cor 11:27). This desire, that both the sacrament and souls be respected and cherished, is something that Pope Francis has continued to emphasize through his recent promulgation of the new Book VI of the *Code of Canon Law*.

“Eucharistic Coherence,” certainly refers to the consistency that must mark a Christian’s actions and his faith: his or her life must match that of the Life of Christ that they receive in Holy Communion. But by this greatest of sacraments, Our Lord does not turn us into cookie-cutter versions of Himself! Rather, marvelously, each of us is meant – in our own particular, unique, unrepeatable way – to emulate what we receive.

Lawrence Feingold, in his comprehensive tome on the theology of the Eucharist, summarizes the Blessed Sacrament as three fundamental gifts: of *presence... of sacrifice... and of communion*. Presence: Jesus truly remaining *with* us. Sacrifice: Jesus offering Himself *for* us. And Communion: Jesus Himself being our spiritual sustenance.

Since the Eucharist is a gift of presence, sacrifice, and communion, what kind of *invitation* does Our Lord offer to us to emulate His gift? How can our lives reflect what we have received? Can our actions and words and deeds echo, or *cohere with*, the Sacrament we approach today?

Presence. Of course, Jesus is present to us in the Blessed Sacrament. He waits for us, remains near to us in every tabernacle, and comes within our bodies and souls in those beautiful minutes after we receive Him at Mass. The Catholic faithful yearned for that presence last summer when we were deprived from attending public Masses! How good it is for everyone to be able to receive Jesus again today!

But what is His Presence like? How can we emulate Him? I think it comes down to a simple action: to give all of our attention to the person that is in front of us at any given minute. Think about it. Jesus is completely present to you when you pray to Him. He does not get distracted. He does not pull out his phone, or run off to something else, or get bored after a while. He stays with us, He speaks to us, He gives all His attention to us. How might we practice this present-ness with those we love?

Sacrifice. This is the second attribute that Prof. Feingold finds in Jesus' gift of His Body and Blood. Of course, we describe the Mass as a "sacrifice," and so it is. It is the re-presentation of the sacrifice that Jesus began at the Last Supper — the Blood of the New Covenant — culminating on Calvary with His sacrificial death on our behalf. A sacrifice is something offered, endured, or given-over to another. In the Old Testament this was often from the first fruits of someone's flock or field. Jesus gives Himself in sacrifice to the Father, and so do we every time we offer something up for love of God. Of course, we do this as well whenever we pour ourselves out in service to the Church, in love for our family or friends, or even on our own as we endure some cross, hardship, or humiliation in self-sacrifice for someone else.

Finally, Communion. Of course, we call the Eucharist "Holy Communion," so again we realize how close to the heart of things we are in describing this Sacrament as a gift of Communion. God Himself is a Communion, a Trinity, and though even that language falls short, every other relationship-word fails even more. Father, Son, and Spirit are not really "friends," or "siblings," or "coworkers." No, they are best described as a

Communion, a Unity, a Trinity: three persons living from a common life, united and entirely consumed by love for each other. And so, when we receive Holy Communion, we are being *received into* that Communion that God *is*. Holy Communion does not so much make us friends, or siblings, or coworkers with God – though those words are not entirely wrong – but our relationship with Him is best described by “communion.” And how do we live that relationship? By letting our life be united with God’s, and our hearts set afire by His love.

At the end of this Mass, we will carry the Blessed Sacrament in procession outside the Cathedral. The meaning behind the *Corpus Christi* procession can be seen in the story of Jesus on His journey one day from Jericho to Jerusalem. On His way, Jesus passed by a blind man named Bartimaeus, who was begging for alms at the side of the road. When the blind man heard the sound of the crowd that was following Jesus, he asked what was going on. The people answered, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” When the blind man heard this, he shouted out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43).

As we walk through the streets in procession with the Blessed Sacrament, people passing by in their cars and on the street will see us and may ask, like Bartimaeus us, what is going on? The answer is the same, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." And our response should also be the same, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

In his book, *Christ is Passing by*, St. Josemaría Escrivá wrote:

The *Corpus Christi* procession makes Christ present in towns and cities throughout the world. But His presence cannot be limited to only one day, like a sound you hear and then forget. It should remind us that we have to discover Our Lord in our ordinary everyday activities. Side by side with this solemn procession there is the simple, silent procession of the ordinary life of each Christian.⁴

Jesus shed His blood for us so that we might spend eternity with Him. Let us pray for the grace to receive Him worthily and make the actions of our everyday lives coherent with the faith we profess and the presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist that we carry with us in our hearts.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Gregory A. Smith, "Just one-third of U.S. Catholics agree with their church that Eucharist is body, blood of Christ," Pew Research Center, August 5, 2019; accessed online at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/>.

² Lydia Saad, "Catholics' Church Attendance Resumes Downward Slide," Gallup, April 9, 2018; accessed online at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/232226/church-attendance-among-catholics-resumes-downward-slide.aspx>.

³ Dalia Fahmy, "U.S. Catholics divided by party on whether Biden should be denied Communion over his abortion stance," Pew Research Center, March 30, 2021; accessed online at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/30/u-s-catholics-divided-by-party-on-whether-biden-should-be-denied-communion-over-his-abortion-stance/>.

⁴ St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing by* (London: Scepter Publishers, Inc., 1974), p. 156.