

## Sermon for the Thanksgiving for the Holy Communion (Corpus Christi) 2020.

Exodus 16:9-15. 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. Psalm 116:11-12 & 16-16.  
John 6:53-58.

**The Collect:** Blessed Lord, who in a wonderful Sacrament has left us a memorial of thy Passion: grant us, we beseech thee, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of thy body and blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of thy redemption, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Just watch your step when you are walking down the street in Castrillo de Murcia, as you might inadvertently tread on a baby or two as they lie on a little mattress in the middle of the road! What?! No, I'm not joking. I'm referring to a custom that developed from 1620 in which babies are jumped over by a man dressed as the devil carrying an oversized castanet and a whip. The point of it was to protect the babies from original sin. It happens on the Feast of Corpus Christi. Strange but true! Pope Benedict XVI asked the Bishops to suppress it on the basis that only valid baptism reverses original sin.

In 1530 Martin Luther wrote in an homily on John 6: 'I am to no festival more hostile ... than (in) this one (festive procession). Because it is the most shameful festival. At no festival are God and his Christ more blasphemed, than on this day, and particularly by the procession. For then people are treating the Blessed Sacrament with such ignominy that it becomes only play-acting and is just vain idolatry. With its cosmetics and false holiness it conflicts with Christ's order and establishment. Because He never commanded us to carry on like this. Therefore, beware of such worship!'

In 1548, during the 'English' Reformation the Feast (and processions) of Corpus Christi was abolished (though later allowed as a Thanksgiving for the Holy Communion). At the end of Mass, the Host would be placed in a monstrance and carried in procession around the parish. I remember participating in this in Oxford when I was an Assistant Priest there. Here is a link to last year's procession in London (2mins):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMIFmscadtk>

At the end of the procession, there would be a service of Benediction of the Holy Sacrament. If you don't have any experience or knowledge of

these ceremonies, then I urge you to have a look on the Internet for some videos about them.

But, clearly, the Feast of Corpus Christi raises both devotion and antagonism. Emotions are high, both for and against the symbolism. This powerful public energy is something akin to that being expended on demonstrations about alleged police law-breaking and racism. And yet, the underlying principle of venerating the Body of Christ, is surely held to be fundamental to all Christians, isn't it? How could any Christian say that the actual body of Christ is of no relevance to us today?

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, if you take the last question as the title of your essay, I look forward to many hours of discussion when you come to the tutorial for feedback. There will be questions and assertions about: the real presence of Christ, the need for symbols (or otherwise), whether or not Christians should display their faith in public, idolatry versus veneration, and so forth? Please do let me know what your own personal questions are.

However, I believe that our longing to partake together of the Holy and Blessed Sacrament of the Mass, should be very deep. As our separation from Him and from one another increases the hunger pains, don't be sad. Be expectant, be joyful, be hopeful, and anticipate the time when you will open your mouth and heart to receive His most excellent gift of grace. Let absence make your heart grow fonder.

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be glory now and forever. Amen.