Homily for Corpus Christi 2026 Year A

Today we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

It is a feast that was instituted in the Catholic Church in the 13th century in Belgium, but its roots, as today's readings show us, reach far back to Moses and the time of the Exodus, the freeing of the people of God from slavery in Egypt.

To understand the symbolism is important.

God established a Special Covenant or Agreement with His chosen people as a condition of their freedom from slavery.

These ritual Covenants or Treaties were sealed by a bloody sacrifice. Hence Moses in the first reading throws the blood of the sacrificial bulls over the altar and over the people as well.

We remember this in that line of the hymn “We holy people stand washed in your blood, spirit-filled yet hungry we await your food”.

Because they were not faithful to the rules of the Covenant, God made them wander for 40 years in the desert but, as part of his continuing love and care, he fed them with a special food from Heaven called Mannah.

When they finally passed over and settled into the Promised Land, they remembered and gave thanks in what was called the Passover Meal.

This was the meal that Christ and his disciples were celebrating in the upper room on Maundy Thursday.

Taking the elements of Bread and Wine, He transformed them into His own Body and Blood and then gave them back, to be a continual source of nourishment for our souls.

Our assent to this mystery requires an enormous act of faith.

We trust the words of Christ “this is My Body and this is My Blood”, not this is like or a symbol of My Body and Blood. And not a one-off event “do this in memory of Me”.

In the Passover Meal the Jewish people remember and give thanks for God's saving presence within. In the Eucharist, established by Christ, we not only remember and give thanks for God's saving presence, but we make it real and alive once more when the elements of Bread and Wine are transformed into spiritual food for our souls.

In the second reading we are reminded that Christ himself is the new High Priest entering the sanctuary to offer Sacrifice, not with the blood of bulls and goats but with His own blood shed in sacrifice for us upon the Cross.

He supersedes the Old Covenant sacrifice by a new and more effective sacrifice, in which is both the High Priest and Victim. God gave them Mannah in the desert, Christ gives us himself, Body and Blood. "I am the living bread which has come down from Heaven, Anyone who eats this bread will live forever".

So, by a huge act of faith, we believe that following Christ's own instructions., when the Priest utters the words of Consecration, the bread and wine are changed into the real Body and Blood of Christ.

Down through the centuries that awesome moment has been embedded in diverse forms of prayers and liturgies that expressed, protected and enhanced the sacredness, the specialness such a moment evokes. It is called the Mass or the Eucharist.

The problem was how to strike the right balance between having something which was lovable, amenable and user friendly, whilst at the same time expressing the high worship it merited.

We got it wrong.

Initially, the specialness that was accorded to the Sacred Consecrated Host, the Body of Christ, so far removed it from human experience, that fear, magic and superstition surrounded it.

The Eucharist could only be celebrated on very rare occasions. You went to Holy Communion, if you dared, perhaps once a year. Nobody could touch the consecrated host except the priest, and even then his two fingers had to be kept joined until the end of the Mass.

The belief developed that the Host was so special that instead of receiving it, it was sufficient just to look at it from a distance to receive the same graces and

blessings. Hence the priest would hold up the host at the Consecration just to show it to the congregation and that was enough for them.

Wealthy people would pay the priest to hold up the host for a longer period of time, for the longer you gazed at it, the more blessings and graces you received.

You had stories and legends of hosts dripping with blood. You knelt to receive the host. You knelt at the altar rails and the server would hold a silver dish under your chin to catch any fragments of the Host that might break off. You had long fasts before going to Holy Communion. It was only from 1914 that children of the age of reason were allowed to go to Communion.

Benediction, 40 hours, street processions and sacred music, visits to the Blessed Sacrament in silent prayer all made the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament a highly mystical phenomenon that was a treasured part of what it was to be a Catholic.

Then came the liturgical reformers who, after the Second Vatican Council, and with the very best of intentions, slowly introduced a programme of change to make the experience and understanding of the Eucharist more amenable to Catholics and make it more 'user friendly'.

Out when the altar rails and the silver plate. You could choose to kneel or stand when you came to Communion. You could touch the host. You could choose to receive it in the hand or on the tongue. Communion could be under both kinds and the fasting rules changed.

It would be disingenuous to deny that something very important has been lost and perhaps can never be recaptured again. No matter how sincere the intentions the reforms were, they have missed the mark. The meaning of the Eucharist has been diminished and impoverished. You can see it in some of the ways that people receive Holy Communion today. More often than not, young people these days, especially children, talk about the bread and wine, not the Body and Blood of Christ.

To go to Holy Communion, to receive the Body of Christ, is essentially a spiritual encounter, to partake of a gift that was given in love. You participate in an intimacy that bestows joy, strength, confidence, healing and peace. That abiding presence of Christ is a profound religious mystery. All religious mysteries have to be approached and understood in a spirit of reverence and

awe to protect it and make it effective, especially in the words and the actions which surround it.

Perhaps in the past the effectiveness of the gift of the Body of Christ was diluted by it being too remote from us, too far away from us. In the present day, its effectiveness and meaning is diluted by being too close to us. We have lowered its impact as a religious mystery. Over familiarity can breed indifference. So now what can we do to restore its specialness to our consciousness?

May I suggest the following?

- When you enter the church to pray or to come to Mass, consciously remind yourself this is a very special place, the House of God. It is a place of Solemnity, Beauty and Peace where God dwells with us in a very special way in the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle on the Altar. It is here that he meets us in the Eucharist.
- Express this by a deliberate and conscious genuflection or bow towards the Blessed Sacrament.
- If you are going to Holy Communion, make sure your hands are clean. If not, on that occasion, receive on the tongue. If you are wearing gloves, remove them.
- Do not be chewing gum or eating sweets as you approach the Altar.
- When the Priest or the Eucharistic Minister offers you the host with the words “the Body of Christ”, look at it, realise what it is and assent to this with the word “Amen”.
- Always consume the host in front of the Priest, not halfway down the church.
- Likewise with the Chalice and the words “the Blood of Christ”.
- When you go back to your seat, sit or kneel and open yourself up to Him who is now in your heart.

It is only through a regular and conscious routine of devotion that is personal to you, that works for you, that you can hold onto, that will deepen this religious mystery of God’s presence with you and to you in the Body of Christ.

Saint Paul writes to his followers in the context of the gift of faith. He says “You have been entrusted with something very special, guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit”. How much more with the Body of Christ?