

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (CORPUS CHRISTI) (YEAR A)

June 14, 2020

Deuteronomy 8:2–3, 14b–16a • 1 Corinthians 10:16–17 • John 6:51–58

I.

Some of my autobiography...

At this time of year, there are several elements of my life that coincide.

Today, June 13, is my patronal feast day: St. Anthony of Padua (1195–1231).

He was Portuguese; I'm half Portuguese.

This past Wednesday, June 10,
was the fourteenth anniversary of my priestly ordination,
which took place right here in the Cathedral.

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

I was ordained a transitional deacon on Corpus Christi: May 28, 2005.

I also have a distinct, although impious, childhood memory of Corpus Christi.

We were living in Brazil at the time,
where Corpus Christi was and still is observed as a holy of obligation,
on a Thursday.

I didn't know what the feast was about,
but I asked told mom,
“Why do we have to go to Mass today?
We just went on Sunday.”

Thankfully she made me go.

II.

At this time of year, with all of those elements coinciding,
I do ponder what my life is about.

I am a priest.

The purpose of my life is to help the Church—all of us—
carry out the work of Jesus Christ.

At the heart of the gathering of the Church—communion—
and the foundation of the Church's work—mission—is the Eucharist.

A priest is ordained to be a shepherd for the faithful.

A priest does that by nourishing the community with the Eucharist,
by preaching the Gospel to its members,
and by guiding it in mission.

This is because you, as lay persons, have your own role:
to consecrate the world to God.

This is the beautiful teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965),
which has Eucharistic undertones:

“The laity, by their very vocation,
seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs
and by ordering them according to the plan of God.
They live in the world, that is,
in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations.
They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life...
They are called there by God that...
they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven”
(*Lumen gentium*, no. 32).

My role, as a priest, is to consecrate the Eucharist for you,
so that you can consecrate the world to God.

The Eucharist is life—God's own life given to us for nourishment.

Jesus solemnly declares:

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,
 you do not have life within you. ...
 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ...
 Just as... I have life because of the Father,
 so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.”

The Eucharist is the result of marvelous change.

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) defined it as “transubstantiation”:
 the substance of bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ;
 only the appearance or “accidents” of bread and wine remain.

And the Council of Trent (1545–1563) taught that the Body and Blood of Christ
 refers to the very person of the Son of God:

“Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself,
 living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner:
 his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity”
 (Decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist).

That is why Catholics approach the Eucharist with the greatest reverence.

That is why we genuflect before the tabernacle.

That change, which nourishes us, is meant to help us change the world.

During this pandemic of COVID-19 and now the calls for racial justice,
 the world needs for us, as Catholics, to act.

In regard to racial equality,
 what our country needs right is for people to listen to one another;
 to respect other people’s experiences, which may be different from our own;
 and to discern ways of overcoming elements of racism that have become
 embedded in society.

Our faith has something important to say about that.

Racism, as Bp. Knestout said at this week’s Racial Healing Service,
 is a sin against human dignity.

Human dignity is rooted in something absolute: God.

Each person is made in the image and likeness of God.

Christ died to redeem each person from sin.

Our rights do not come from the government;
our rights come from God, and therefore the government, and all people,
must respect them.

In fact, this principle is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident,
that all men are created equal,
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.
—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men,
deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Respect for those rights has always been imperfect in American history,
egregiously so in regard to persons of African descent.

So, the work continues.

On the feast of Corpus Christi, the holy Eucharist is carried aloft in procession,
as I will do at the end of Mass.

That beautiful rite and noble custom professes our faith in God.

That Christ is present in the Holy Eucharist.

That bread and wine are changed into his Body and Blood.

That this Most Holy Sacrament is food for us,
so that we can change the world.