

**THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST
(CORPUS CHRISTI, YEAR B)**

June 6, 2021

Exodus 24:3–8 • Hebrews 9:11–15 • Mark 14:12–16, 22–26

I.

About a month ago,
I administered First Holy Communion to a child who was not able
to attend the communal celebration the Sunday before.

In the sacristy afterward,
as I was putting away my vestments,
I got a call on the emergency line.

Someone in the hospital was dying, and asked to see a priest.

So, in between the pictures that the family was taking of their first communicant,
I retrieved a host from the tabernacle and went to the hospital.

There I gave the woman and her husband Holy Communion.

She was clearly moved and comforted by the sacrament,
and thanked me multiple times.

When the Eucharist is received on the verge of death,
it's called *Viaticum*, which means, "food for the journey."

So, in the span of an hour,
I gave the Eucharist to one person for the first time
and to another person for close to the last time.

It was a vivid reminder that the Eucharist sustains us throughout our lives.

II.

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ,
commonly known by its name in Latin: *Corpus Christi*.

The purpose of this feast is to deepen our appreciation of the Eucharist and to give witness of our devotion to this holy sacrament.

The Eucharist is the Church's greatest treasure.

After all, it's the living memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, the event of our salvation.

The Eucharist refers to both the liturgical celebration of Christ's death and resurrection—the Mass—and the sacrament that flows from it.

The Mass is the Church's offering of the sacrifice of Christ's death and resurrection.

It's a continuation of the Last Supper, in which, as we heard in the Gospel, Christ gave us a way of participating in his death and resurrection.

The renewal of Jesus' sacrifice in the Mass involves the change of bread and wine into Christ himself: "This is my body... this is my blood."

The body and blood of Christ are not parts of Jesus but his entire person, both crucified and risen:

The Council of Trent, which met in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, taught that,

"In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist
'the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity,
of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ
is truly, really, and substantially contained'"
(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1374).

So, the Eucharist is not just a sign that helps us to think about Christ; it is Christ himself.

In the Mass, we offer the sacrifice of our lives together with the sacrifice of Christ's death and resurrection.

When properly disposed,
we are encouraged to then receive Christ in the Eucharist,
the sacrificial victim.

When the Eucharist is received,
we call it “Holy Communion” because it brings about our union with Christ.

The Eucharist gives us the power to live and to love like Christ.

For this reason,
Catholics treat the Eucharist with the greatest reverence.

We genuflect when we enter the church.

Today, we renew the venerable custom of ringing the bells at the consecration,
to remind ourselves and to proclaim that Christ becomes present.

The Eucharist, because it is Christ himself, calls forth the best in us,
the best we have to offer.

That is why we use sacred vestments and sacred vessels.

These items remind us that we’re meant to give our entire lives to God.

During the pandemic,
many people were separated from the Eucharist.

And even now, many Catholics have not yet returned to Mass.

You may have heard that beginning the weekend of June 26–27,
the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass will be lifted
here in the Diocese of Richmond and throughout the Mid-Atlantic region.

With the decreasing number of COVID infections,
the increased number of vaccinations,
and the easing of pandemic restrictions,
Catholics will once again be obliged to attend Mass each Sunday
and holy day of obligation
(unless, as always, there is a serious reason for not doing so).

Why is Sunday Mass normally obligatory?

The reason is that it is so important.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that,

“The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason... Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin” (no. 2181).

For some time,
the obligation to attend Mass has not been enough to draw people to Church.

But the obligation tells us that the Eucharist is important.

What’s needed now is your testimony,
your witness to the power of the Eucharist in your life.

When we understand that the Eucharist is the power and presence of Christ,
the question isn’t so much why **should** attend Mass;
the question is why we **wouldn’t** attend Mass.

So, an encouragement:
Reach out to someone you know who has not yet returned to Mass.

Ask how the person is doing.

Without guilt-tripping or browbeating,
encourage the person to consider returning to Mass.

Listen the person’s concerns and questions,
and address them as best you can.

Explain why you come to Mass.

Give witness to how the Eucharist affects your life.

The Mass takes its name from the dismissal at the end of the celebration:
in Latin, *Ite, missa est*: “Go forth, the Mass is ended.”

With these words,
we carry the Eucharist with us into the world,
to make the Son of God present there.

Our testimony matters.

The beautiful white dress on a girl's First Communion day,
or the heartfelt reception of Christ's body and blood in a hospital bed,
are forms of witness.

A testimony the Eucharist is *Corpus Christi*:
Christ himself, who sustains us throughout our lives.