



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF CORPUS CHRISTI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Square outside the Basilica of Saint John Lateran

Thursday, 23 June 2011

(Video)

[Photo Gallery](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Feast of *Corpus Christi* is inseparable from Holy Thursday, from the Mass *in Caena Domini*, in which the Institution of the Eucharist is solemnly celebrated. Whereas on the evening of Holy Thursday we relive the mystery of Christ who offers himself to us in the bread broken and the wine poured out, today, on the day of *Corpus Christi*, this same mystery is proposed for the adoration and meditation of the People of God, and the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession through the streets of the cities and villages, to show that the Risen Christ walks in our midst and guides us towards the Kingdom of Heaven.

What Jesus gave to us in the intimacy of the Upper Room today we express openly, because the love of Christ is not reserved for a few but is destined for all. In the [Mass in Caena Domini last Holy Thursday](#), I stressed that it is in the Eucharist that the transformation of the gifts of this earth takes place — the bread and wine — whose aim is to transform our life and thereby to inaugurate the transformation of the world. This evening I would like to focus on this perspective.

Everything begins, one might say, from the heart of Christ who, at the Last Supper, on the eve of his passion, thanked and praised God and by so doing, with the power of his love, transformed the meaning of death which he was on his way to encounter. The fact that the Sacrament of the Altar acquired the name “Eucharist” — “thanksgiving” — expresses precisely this: that changing the

substance of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is the fruit of the gift that Christ made of himself, the gift of a Love stronger than death, divine Love which raised him from the dead. This is why the Eucharist is the food of eternal life, the Bread of Life. From Christ's heart, from his "Eucharistic prayer" on the eve of his passion flows that dynamism which transforms reality in its cosmic, human and historical dimensions. All things proceed from God, from the omnipotence of his Triune Love, incarnate in Jesus. Christ's heart is steeped in this Love; therefore he can thank and praise God even in the face of betrayal and violence, and in this way changes things, people and the world.

This transformation is possible thanks to a communion stronger than division, the communion of God himself. The word "communion", which we also use to designate the Eucharist, in itself sums up the vertical and horizontal dimensions of Christ's gift.

The words "to receive communion", referring to the act of eating the Bread of the Eucharist, are beautiful and very eloquent. In fact, when we do this act we enter into communion with the very life of Jesus, into the dynamism of this life which is given to us and for us. From God, through Jesus, to us: a unique communion is transmitted through the Blessed Eucharist.

We have just heard in the Second Reading the words of the Apostle Paul to the Christians of Corinth: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16-17).

St Augustine helps us to understand the dynamic of Eucharistic communion when he mentions a sort of vision that he had, in which Jesus said to him: "I am the food of strong men; grow and you shall feed on me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh into yourself, but you shall be changed into my likeness" (*Confessions*, vii, 10, 18).

Therefore whereas food for the body is assimilated by our organism and contributes to nourishing it, in the case of the Eucharist it is a different Bread: it is not we who assimilate it but it assimilates us in itself, so that we become conformed to Jesus Christ, a member of his Body, one with him. This passage is crucial. In fact, precisely because it is Christ who, in Eucharistic communion changes us into him, our individuality, in this encounter, is opened, liberated from its egocentrism and inserted into the Person of Jesus who in his turn is immersed in Trinitarian communion. The Eucharist, therefore, while it unites us to Christ also opens us to others, makes us members of one another: we are no longer divided but one in him. Eucharistic communion not only unites me to the person I have beside me and with whom I may not even be on good terms, but also to our distant brethren in every part of the world.

Hence the profound sense of the Church's social presence derives from the Eucharist, as is testified by the great social saints who were always great Eucharistic souls. Those who recognize

Jesus in the sacred Host, recognize him in their suffering brother or sister, in those who hunger and thirst, who are strangers, naked, sick or in prison; and they are attentive to every person, they work in practice for all who are in need.

Therefore our special responsibility as Christians for building a supportive, just and brotherly society comes from the gift of Christ's love. Especially in our time, in which globalization makes us more and more dependent on each other, Christianity can and must ensure that this unity is not built without God, that is, without true Love, which would give way to confusion, individualism and the tyranny of each one seeking to oppress the others. The Gospel has always aimed at the unity of the human family, a unity that is neither imposed from the outside nor by ideological or economic interests but on the contrary is based on the sense of reciprocal responsibility, so that we may recognize each other as members of one and the same Body, the Body of Christ, because from the Sacrament of the Altar we have learned and are constantly learning that sharing, love, is the path to true justice.

Let us now return to Jesus' action at the Last Supper. What happened at that moment? When he said: "this is my body which is given for you, this is the cup of my blood which is poured out for many, what happened? In this gesture Jesus was anticipating the event of Calvary. Out of love he accepted the whole passion, with its anguish and its violence, even to death on the cross. In accepting it in this manner he changed it into an act of giving. This is the transformation which the world needs most, to redeem it from within, to open it to the dimensions of the Kingdom of Heaven.

However, God always wishes to bring about this renewal of the world on the same path followed by Christ, that way which is indeed he himself. There is nothing magic about Christianity. There are no short-cuts; everything passes through the humble and patient logic of the grain of wheat that broke open to give life, the logic of faith that moves mountains with the gentle power of God. For this reason God wishes to continue to renew humanity, history and the cosmos through this chain of transformations, of which the Eucharist is the sacrament. Through the consecrated bread and wine, in which his Body and his Blood are really present, Christ transforms us, conforming us to him: he involves us in his work of redemption, enabling us, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, to live in accordance with his own logic of self-giving, as grains of wheat united to him and in him. Thus are sown and continue to mature in the furrows of history unity and peace, which are the end for which we strive, in accordance with God's plan.

Let us walk with no illusions, with no utopian ideologies, on the highways of the world bearing within us the Body of the Lord, like the Virgin Mary in the mystery of the Visitation. With the humility of knowing that we are merely grains of wheat, let us preserve the firm certainty that the love of God, incarnate in Christ, is stronger than evil, violence and death. We know that God prepares for all men and women new heavens and a new earth, in which peace and justice reign — and in faith we perceive the new world which is our true homeland.

This evening too, let us start out: while the sun is setting on our beloved city of Rome: Jesus in the Eucharist is with us, the Risen One who said: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). Thank you, Lord Jesus! Thank you for your faithfulness which sustains our hope. Stay with us because night is falling. "Very bread, Good Shepherd, tend us, Jesus, of your love befriend us, You refresh us, you defend us, Your eternal goodness send us in the land of life to see". Amen.

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