



The Holy See

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST
CELEBRATED WITH FIRST COMMUNICANTS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

St Peter's Basilica

14 June 1979

Beloved boys and girls!

Great is my joy on seeing you here, so numerous and so full of fervour, to celebrate with the Pope the liturgical solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord!

I greet you all and each one individually with the deepest tenderness, and I thank you for having come to renew your Holy Communion with the Pope and for the Pope. I thank also your parish priests, always dynamic and zealous, and your parents and relatives, who have prepared you and accompanied you.

I have still before my eyes the impressive sight of the immense multitudes met during my journey in Poland; and now here is the spectacle of the Children of Rome, here is your marvellous innocence, your sparkling eyes, your restless smiles!

You are the favourites of Jesus: "Let the children come to me!", the divine Master said, "Do not hinder them!" (Lk 18:16).

You are also my favourites!

Dear boys and girls! You prepared for your First Communion with such commitment and diligence, and your first meeting with Jesus was a moment of intense emotion and deep happiness. Remember for ever this blessed day of First Communion! Remember for ever your fervour and

your pure joy!

And now you have come here, to renew your meeting with Jesus. You could not make me a finer and more precious gift!

Many children had expressed the desire to receive First Communion from the hands of the Pope. Certainly, it would have been a great pastoral consolation for me to give Jesus for the first time to the boys and girls of Rome. But that is not possible; and then it is better for each child to receive his First Communion in his own parish, from his own parish priest. But at least it is possible for me to give Holy Communion today to representatives of yours, keeping all the others present in my love, in this vast and magnificent Upper Room! And this is for me and for you an immense joy which we will never forget! At the same time I wish to leave with you some thoughts, which can help you to keep your faith always limpid, your love for Jesus in the Eucharist always fervent, and your life innocent.

1. *Jesus is present with us.*

This is the first thought.

Jesus rose again, he ascended to heaven: but he willed to remain with us and for us, in every place on earth. The Eucharist is really a divine invention!

Before dying on the Cross, offering his life to the Father as a sacrifice of adoration and love, Jesus instituted the Eucharist, changing the bread and the wine into his own Person and giving the Apostles and their successors, the Bishops and Priests, the power of making him present in Holy Mass. Jesus, therefore, willed to remain with us for ever! Jesus willed to be closely united with us in Holy Communion, to prove his love to us directly and personally. Each one can say: "Jesus loves me! I love Jesus".

St Teresa of the Child Jesus, recalling the day of her First Communion, wrote: "Oh, how sweet was the first kiss that Jesus gave my soul!... It was a kiss of love, I felt loved and I said in my turn: 'I love you, I give myself to you for ever'... Teresa had disappeared like a drop of water lost in the ocean. There remained only Jesus: the master, the King" (Teresa di Lisieux, *Storia di un'anima*. Ediz. Oueriniana, 1974, Man. A, Chap. IV, page 75). And she began to weep with joy and consolation, to the amazement of her companions.

Jesus is present in the Eucharist to be met, loved, received and consoled. Wherever there is the priest, Jesus is present, because the mission and greatness of the Priest is precisely the celebration of Holy Mass.

Jesus is present in large cities and in little villages, in mountain churches and in the distant huts of

Africa and Asia, in hospitals and prisons; Jesus in the Eucharist was even present in the concentration camps!

Dear children! Receive Jesus often! Abide in him; let yourselves be transformed by him!

2. *Jesus is your greatest friend*

Here is the second thought.

Never forget it! Jesus wishes to be our closest friend, our companion along the way.

You have, certainly, so many friends; but you cannot always be with them and they cannot always help you, listen to you, console you.

Jesus, on the contrary, is the friend who never abandons you. Jesus knows you one by one, personally. He knows your name. He follows you, accompanies you, walks with you every day. He participates in your joys and consoles you in moments of grief and sadness. Jesus is the friend we cannot do without when we have met him and understood that he loves us and wants our love.

You can speak and confide in him; you can address him with affection and confidence. Jesus even died on the Cross for our sake! Make a pact of friendship with Jesus and never break it! In all the situations of your life, turn to the Divine Friend, present in us with his "Grace", present with us and in us in the Eucharist.

And be also messengers and joyful witnesses of your friend Jesus in your families, among your companions, in the places where you play and spend your holidays, in this modern society, so often so sad and dissatisfied.

3 *Jesus is waiting for its*

Here is the last thought.

Life, long or short, is a journey towards Paradise: there is our fatherland, there is our real home; there is our appointment!,

Jesus is waiting for us in paradise! Never forget this supreme and consoling truth. And what is Holy Communion but an anticipation of Paradise? In fact, in the Eucharist it is Jesus himself who is waiting for us and whom we will meet one day openly in Heaven.

Receive Jesus often in order never to forget Paradise, to be always on the march towards the house of the Heavenly Father, to enjoy Paradise a little already!

This had been understood by Domenico Savio, who at the age of seven got permission to receive

First Communion, and on that day wrote his resolutions: "First I will confess very often and I will receive Communion whenever the confessor gives me permission. Second: I wish to sanctify feast days. Third: my friends will be Jesus and Mary. Fourth: death but not sins."

What little Domenico wrote so many years ago (in 1849) still holds good now and will hold good for ever.

Beloved boys and girls, I conclude by saying to you, keep yourselves worthy of Jesus whom you receive! Be innocent and generous! Undertake to make life beautiful for everyone. With obedience, kindness, good manners! The secret of joy is goodness!

And to you, parents and relatives, I say anxiously and confidently: love your children, respect them, edify them! Be worthy of their innocence and of the mystery enclosed in their soul, created directly by God! They need love, delicacy, a good example, maturity! Do not neglect them! Do not betray them!

I entrust you all to Mary Most Holy, our Mother in heaven, the Star of the sea of our life: pray to her every day, you children! Give your hand to Mary, Most Holy, so that she may lead you to receive Jesus in a holy way.

And let us also address a thought of affection and solidarity to all suffering children, to all boys and girls who cannot receive Jesus because they do not know him, to all parents who have been tragically deprived of their children or are disappointed and grieved in their expectations.

In your meeting with Jesus pray for everyone, commend everyone, invoke grace and assistance for everyone!

And pray also for me, you who are my favourites!

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