

Corpus Christi - B
Exodus 24:3-8;
Hebrews 9:11-15;
Mark 14:12-16, 22-26
Little Flower - 6/7/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, commonly called Corpus Christi, which means *Body of Christ*.

Whenever we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, we celebrate our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. However, I recently read that many adult Catholics no longer believe that the bread and wine really become the Body and Blood of Christ.

As we heard in today's Gospel, at the Last Supper, Jesus said, "*This is my body... This is my blood of the covenant.*" Jesus spoke Aramaic. In a talk at St. Meinrad, Lutheran theologian Joachim Jeremias argued that the Aramaic words Jesus would have used did not have a symbolic meaning. In other words, they could not mean, "This is a sign or symbol of my body. This is a sign or symbol of my blood."

In my Corpus Christi homily last year, I mentioned that the transformative power of the Holy Spirit was at work in creation and at the Incarnation. In the story of creation, we read how "*God's spirit hovered over the water*" [Gen. 1:2; JB, 1966]. At the Annunciation, the angel told Mary, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God*" [Lk. 1:35]. Today, we invoke the same Holy Spirit to transform bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ: "*Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you: by the same spirit graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration, that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ...*" [Eucharistic Prayer III].

If we do not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we have to ask ourselves what else we do not believe. For example, do we really believe in the virginal conception of Jesus, i.e., that Jesus did not have a human father, and that Jesus truly is the incarnate Son of God? Do we really believe in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus? If we say that we believe in Jesus' virginal conception and resurrection, then we have to ask ourselves why we do not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. All three are miracles. Perhaps today's decline in Sunday Mass attendance is directly related to lack of faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Of course, to believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we have to see with eyes of faith. The Eucharist still looks and tastes like bread, still looks and tastes like wine. In a sense, our struggle to believe in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist is almost identical to the struggle of the people of Jesus' time to believe that Jesus was Son of God and Savior. Jesus looked just like us. He looked like an ordinary man.

My brothers and sisters, recently within the Church, there have been debates over who is worthy to receive the Eucharist. In a recent homily, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster, challenged all of us:

[The Eucharist] is also and always the sacrament of our transformation, the sacrament of what we are to become. We can never receive Holy Communion with a good heart and a right intention unless we are willing to be changed, willing to be converted. Holy Communion can never be reduced to a sign or badge of acceptability, for it is always an invitation and a challenge to which we have to respond. If we are to receive the Eucharist faithfully and worthily, then we must be willing to be different, to be changed, everyone of us, by him whom we receive.¹

¹Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Homily given on Sunday 10 May 2016, Sixth Sunday of Easter at the Immaculate Conception Church, Farm Street, <http://rcdow.org.uk/cardinal/homilies/mass-at-farm-street-parish/>.