



The Holy See

MASS AND EUCHARISTIC PROCESSION
ON THE SOLEMNITY OF CORPUS DOMINI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Square before the Basilica of St John Lateran
Thursday, 26 May 2005*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

On the feast of *Corpus Domini*, the Church relives the mystery of Holy Thursday in the light of the Resurrection. There is also a Eucharistic procession on Holy Thursday, when the Church repeats the exodus of Jesus from the Upper Room to the Mount of Olives.

In Israel, the night of the Passover was celebrated in the home, within the intimacy of the family; this is how the first Passover in Egypt was commemorated, the night in which the blood of the paschal lamb, sprinkled on the crossbeam and doorposts of the houses, served as protection against the destroyer.

On that night, Jesus goes out and hands himself over to the betrayer, the destroyer, and in so doing, overcomes the night, overcomes the darkness of evil. Only in this way is the gift of the Eucharist, instituted in the Upper Room, fulfilled: Jesus truly gives his Body and his Blood. Crossing over the threshold of death, he becomes living Bread, true manna, endless nourishment for eternity. The flesh becomes the Bread of Life.

In the Holy Thursday procession, the Church accompanies Jesus to the Mount of Olives: it is the authentic desire of the Church in prayer to keep watch with Jesus, not to abandon him in the night

of the world, on the night of betrayal, on the night of the indifference of many people.

On the feast of *Corpus Domini*, we again go on this procession, but in the joy of the Resurrection. The Lord is risen and leads us. In the narrations of the Resurrection there is a common and essential feature; the angels say: the Lord "goes ahead of you to Galilee, where you will see him" (Mt 28: 7).

Taking this into deep consideration, we can say that this "going ahead" of Jesus implies a two-way direction.

The first is, as we have heard, Galilee. In Israel, Galilee was considered to be the doorway to the pagan world. And in reality, precisely on the mountain in Galilee, the disciples see Jesus, the Lord, who tells them: "Go... and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28: 19).

The other preceding direction of the Risen One appears in the Gospel of St John, in the words of Jesus to Mary Magdalene: "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (Jn 20: 17).

Jesus goes before us next to the Father, rises to the heights of God and invites us to follow him. These two directions on the Risen One's journey are not contradictory, for both indicate the path to follow Christ.

The true purpose of our journey is communion with God. He himself is the house of many dwelling places (cf. Jn 14: 2ff.); but we can be elevated to these dwelling places only by going "towards Galilee", travelling on the pathways of the world, taking the Gospel to all nations, carrying the gift of his love to the men and women of all times.

Therefore, the journey of the Apostles extends to the "ends of the earth" (cf. Acts 1: 6ff.). In this way, Sts Peter and Paul went all the way to Rome, a city that at that time was the centre of the known world, the true *caput mundi*.

The Holy Thursday procession accompanies Jesus in his solitude towards the *via crucis*. The *Corpus Domini* procession responds instead in a symbolic way to the mandate of the Risen One: I go before you to Galilee. Go to the extreme ends of the world, take the Gospel to the world.

Of course, by faith, the Eucharist is an intimate mystery. The Lord instituted the Sacrament in the Upper Room, surrounded by his new family, by the 12 Apostles, a prefiguration and anticipation of the Church of all times.

And so, in the liturgy of the ancient Church, the distribution of Holy Communion was introduced with the words *Sancta sanctis*: the holy gift is intended for those who have been made holy.

In this way a response was given to the exhortation of St Paul to the Corinthians: "A man should examine himself first; only then should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup..." (1 Cor 11: 28).

Nevertheless, from this intimacy that is a most personal gift of the Lord, the strength of the Sacrament of the Eucharist goes above and beyond the walls of our Churches. In this Sacrament, the Lord is always journeying to meet the world. This universal aspect of the Eucharistic presence becomes evident in today's festive procession.

We bring Christ, present under the sign of bread, onto the streets of our city. We entrust these streets, these homes, our daily life, to his goodness. May our streets be streets of Jesus! May our houses be homes for him and with him! May our life of every day be penetrated by his presence.

With this gesture, let us place under his eyes the sufferings of the sick, the solitude of young people and the elderly, temptations, fears - our entire life. The procession represents an immense and public blessing for our city: Christ is, in person, the divine Blessing for the world. May the ray of his blessing extend to us all!

In the *Corpus Domini* procession, we walk with the Risen One on his journey to meet the entire world, as we said. By doing precisely this, we too answer his mandate: "Take, eat... Drink of it, all of you" (Mt 26: 26ff.).

It is not possible to "eat" the Risen One, present under the sign of bread, as if it were a simple piece of bread. To eat this Bread is to communicate, to enter into communion with the person of the living Lord. This communion, this act of "eating", is truly an encounter between two persons, it is allowing our lives to be penetrated by the life of the One who is the Lord, of the One who is my Creator and Redeemer.

The purpose of this communion, of this partaking, is the assimilation of my life with his, my transformation and conformation into he who is living Love. Therefore, this communion implies adoration, it implies the will to follow Christ, to follow the One who goes ahead of us. Adoration and procession thereby make up a single gesture of communion; they answer his mandate: "Take and eat".

Our procession finishes in front of the Basilica of St Mary Major in the encounter with Our Lady, called by the dear Pope John Paul II, "Woman of the Eucharist". Mary, Mother of the Lord, truly teaches us what entering into communion with Christ is: Mary offered her own flesh, her own blood to Jesus and became a living tent of the Word, allowing herself to be penetrated by his presence in body and spirit.

Let us pray to her, our holy Mother, so that she may help us to open our entire being, always more, to Christ's presence; so that she may help us to follow him faithfully, day after day, on the

streets of our life. *Amen.*

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