

Pastor's Point

June 2, 2024 - Corpus Christi Sunday

On this Corpus Christi Sunday let us take a few moments to reflect on the profound words of Pope Francis about the Eucharist...

ON THE LITURGICAL FORMATION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

An Apostolic Letter by Pope Francis

Excerpts from pages 46, 47, 60, 61.

7. Only a few hours after the Supper, the apostles could have seen in the cross of Jesus, if they could have borne the weight of it, what it meant for Jesus to say, “body offered,” “blood poured out.” It is this of which we make memorial in every eucharist. When the risen One returns from the dead to break the bread for the disciples at Emmaus, and for his disciples who had gone back to fishing for fish and not for people on the Sea of Galilee, that gesture of breaking the bread opens their eyes. It heals them from the blindness inflicted by the horror of the cross, and it renders them capable of “seeing” the Risen One, of believing in the Resurrection.

8. If we had somehow arrived in Jerusalem after Pentecost and had felt the desire not only to have information about Jesus of Nazareth but rather the desire still to be able to meet him, we would have had no other possibility than that of searching out his disciples so that we could hear his words and see his gestures, more alive than ever. We would have had no other possibility of a true encounter with him other than that of the community that celebrates. For this reason the Church has always protected as its most precious treasure the command of the Lord, “Do this in memory of me.”

9. From the very beginning the Church was aware that this was not a question of a representation, however sacred it be, of the Supper of the Lord. It would have made no sense, and no one would have been able to think of “staging”—especially before the eyes of Mary, the Mother of the Lord—that highest moment of the life of the Master. From the very beginning the church had grasped, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that that which was visible in Jesus, that which could be seen with the eyes and touched with the hands, his words and his gestures, the concreteness of the

incarnate Word—everything of Him had passed into the celebration of the sacraments.

10. Here lies all the powerful beauty of the liturgy. If the resurrection were for us a concept, an idea, a thought; if the risen One were for us the recollection of the recollection of others, however authoritative, as, for example, of the Apostles; if there were not given also to us the possibility of a true encounter with Him, that would be to declare the newness of the Word made flesh to have been all used up. Instead, the Incarnation, in addition to being the only always new event that history knows, is also the very method that the Holy Trinity has chosen to open to us the way of communion. Christian faith is either an encounter with Him alive, or it does not exist.

11. The Liturgy guarantees for us the possibility of such an encounter. For us a vague memory of the Last Supper would do no good. We need to be present at that Supper, to be able to hear his voice, to eat his Body and to drink his blood. We need Him. In the Eucharist and in all the sacraments we are guaranteed the possibility of encountering the Lord Jesus and of having the power of his Paschal Mystery reach us. The salvic power of the sacrifice of Jesus, his every word, his every gesture, glance, and feeling reaches us through the celebration of the sacraments. I am Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man possessed by demons at Capernaum, the paralytic in the house of Peter, the sinful woman pardoned, the woman afflicted by hemorrhages, the daughter of Jairus, the blind man of Jericho, Zacchaeus, Lazarus, the thief and Peter both pardoned. The Lord Jesus who dies no more, who lives forever with the signs of his Passion continues to pardon us, to heal us, to save us with the power of the sacraments. It is the concrete way, by means of his incarnation, that he loves us. It is the way in which he satisfies his own thirst for us that he had declared from the cross (John 19:28).

41. From all that we have said about the nature of the Liturgy it becomes clear that knowledge of the mystery of Christ, the decisive question for our lives, does not consist in a mental assimilation of some idea but in real existential engagement with his person. In this sense, Liturgy is not about “knowledge,” and its scope is not primarily pedagogical, even though it does have great pedagogical value (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 33). Rather, Liturgy is about praise, about rendering thanks for the Passover of the Son whose power reaches our lives. The celebration concerns the reality of our being docile to the action of the Spirit who operates through it until Christ be formed in us (cf. Gal 4:19). The full extent of our formation is our conformation to Christ. I repeat: it does not have to do with an abstract mental process, but with becoming Him. This is the purpose for which the Spirit is given, whose action is always and only to confection the Body of Christ. It is that way

with the Eucharistic bread, with every one of the baptized called to become always more and more that which was received as a gift in Baptism; namely, being a member of the Body of Christ. Leo the Great writes, “Our participation in the Body and Blood of Christ has no other end than to make us become that which we eat.”