

Corpus Christi Feast Homily 2018

Have you ever been asked why Catholics celebrate communion at the drop of a hat? Just think about it. We have communion every Sunday, at weddings, at funerals, even on weekdays. Most Protestant communities don't. Where did this custom come from?

As we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body and blood of Christ let's take a look at the origin of communion, of sharing in the body and blood of Christ. Let us look at its origins, its ancient roots.

First reading from Exodus: 24

- God makes a covenant with Moses and the Israelites on Mt. Sinai**
- Yahweh promises to be their God who is always with them, protecting them, walking with them.**
- They promise to keep the commandments and be God's people**
- They seal the agreement, the covenant with a sacrifice of an animal**
- They take some of the blood...the life flow of the animal (explain the meaning of life-flow) and pour it on the altar symbolizing God.**
- They take some of the blood and sprinkle it on the people.**

- They say, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you.
- God and the Israelites are covenanted to each other forever. (pause)
- Then the households take some of the animal has been sacrificed and bring it home for a sacred meal.

The story of this Passover meal continues in today’s gospel. 1,200 year later, Jesus, an Israelite, instructs his disciples to prepare for the Passover meal.

- Each year at Passover all the Israelite people renew the covenant God made with them on Sinai.
- Each family brings an animal to the temple to be sacrificed.
- Then they would take some of the meat from the sacrifice home for the Passover meal.
- Observant Jews, even to today, believe that when they share this Passover meal, they enter the very moment when their ancestors made that first covenant with God at Mt. Sinai.
- But at the last Passover meal Jesus had with his disciples, he added one important element. He took the bread, gave thanks for it and gave it to his disciples saying, “This is my body given for you.” Then he took the cup of blessing, gave thanks, gave it

and said, “this is the cup of my blood of the NEW covenant given for you. Whenever you do this, make memory of me.”

And so, the first disciples of risen Lord in the Early Church would gather for meals every Sunday. They would renew the new covenant with the God. St. Paul would refer to the community as the Body of Christ. Yes, the Body of Christ first referred to the people who celebrated the sacrifice of Christ and followed his way of living. (Tell the story of the first dispute in the Church with feeding the hungry members). Only later in the Middle Ages did the Feast of Corpus Christ develop a heavy focus on the belief of the presence of the Risen Lord in the elements of bread and wine.

(pause)

Now you know more deeply WHY we celebrate mass and share in the Body of Blood of Christ so often in the Catholic Church.

I would like to take a moment and focus on HOW we can more deeply enter into this celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Key to the notion of Corpus Christi is a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for his body, the Church, and how we can enter more fully into this sacrifice.

What does “to sacrifice” mean?: It means to make life holy by contributing to it.

- In the Old Testament, God gives himself to the Israelite people.
- The Israelite people give themselves to God by keeping the commandments.
- They both enter into the sacrifice
- They make life holy by contributing to it.

Jesus brings “sacrifice” to a whole level at the last supper:

He says, “This is my body given for you.”

“This is my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

This is my sacrifice for you.

This is how I will make life holy for you.

I give you my life.

Then he says: DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME! YOU DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

**Every time we share in this sacrificial meal,
every time we time we say AMEN when we receive communion, we
commit ourselves to make life holy by contributing to it.**

Do this in memory of me.

We make this sacrifice; we make life holy.

(Pause)

The other day I was with a group of members visiting homes in our neighborhood and letting them know we are here. Two of us approached the front door of a home and a man in his mid-thirties from Nigeria and his mother came to the door. We explained who we were and he asked us just one question; “What are you doing for the community?” He realized that if we were really the Body of Christ we would be sacrificing our lives to make people holy.

Then last Friday some of us joined other Christian churches to pray for an end of violence in our urban neighborhoods. I put the address of the church near Sacred Heart Major Seminare where we were meeting into my GPS. When I got close to the building, my GPS said “You have reached your destination.” I pulled in a parking lot next to a building with a large cross painted on the wall. I got out of the car and walked up to five young men. Then suddenly I realized that the cross was a GREEN cross and the building was a place to purchase marijuana! They directed me to the church a block down the street. A few minutes later after I had joined the walkers, we passed the building with the green cross. Someone had thrown a dime bag of pot

onto the curb. Maybe the sacrifice of our marching and prayer had made a positive effect on one of the young men at the store.

(Pause)

We may ask ourselves,

How do we sacrifice? How do we make life holy?

There are three simple steps: We need to do with our lives what Jesus did at the last supper.

First, he took hold of the bread and the cup of wine

You need to take hold of yourself; get ahold of yourself

Second, he gave thanks to God:

Our life is not our own; all we have and are is gift;

The gratitude and thanks from within will fill us up and it will overflow.

Third, He broke the bread and poured out the wine.

Filled with gratitude, we are ready to pour ourselves out in service of others in His name.

(pause)

John Shea, a theologian, says that if we meditate upon Jesus' gestures at his last supper (to take, to give thanks, and to pour out) we can become spiritually smarter and holier. But he warns us; we need all three steps.

- If we see ourselves as the center of the universe, we remain uninvolved in life. We don't take hold of ourselves. We just float.
- And if we simply live in thanks for all God has blessed us with, we do not move forward to join Christ in sacrifice of our lives; we risk naval gazing. (We live from one spiritual high after another.)
- And if we try to sacrifice ourselves for others without first being grateful for all God has given us, we can easily become resentful.

On this feast of Corpus Christ We let us commit ourselves to enter more fully into the sacrifice of Christ.

- To take hold of ourselves,
- To give thanks and praise to God for our many blessings,
- And then, with and in Christ, to pour out ourselves for the salvation of the world.