Homily for Corpus Christi

6 June 2021

S. Stephen’s, Providence

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“At the Episcopal Church you get something to eat.”

Those were the words a young boy scout exclaimed

in Painesville, Ohio, in the 1950s,

after having attended mass at the local Episcopal Church.

At his native Presbyterian Church,

the Lord’s Supper was celebrated a mere four times a year.

But at the Episcopal Church, as he noted, you got something to eat.

My late and beloved mentor, Fr. Tony Jarvis,

once began a Corpus Christi homily with that small vignette

from his childhood.

It was his fellow boy scout who had attended mass at his Episcopal church.

He noted that the boy’s matter-of-fact observation

really cut to the point of it all:

We come to mass, to church, to be fed for life’s journey –

to be sustained and nurtured.

Today, on this feast of Corpus Christi,

we give special thanks and express our gratitude and joy

for the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood.

It sounds simple on the surface –

giving thanks for a sacrament.

But if we pause and consider what it is we truly receive in this Sacrament,

we could fill volumes with the wondrous benefits of this sacred meal.

Fear not, I will not be attempting to do that this morning.

In fact, I will be briefer than usual.

I simply have two points for us to consider this morning.

First, in the Eucharist, we are shown that our God is a God

who values the material stuff of life.

He is not remote and distant, but chooses to be known to us

in everyday substances like bread and wine.

We worship a God who can be known through the material world,

because he desires us to know him, just as he desires to know us –

he desires to dwell within us, and we in him.

In his Incarnation,

he shows that every blade of grass, every petal of a sunflower,

every feather of a bird, every sunset creating a blazing pink and purple sky

is capable of showing us God’s glory and love –

that every person – each one of us – is loved and called to be holy,

to be recognized as sacred and imbued with the love of the Creator,

made in his image.

And so how much more do we know and experience the love of God

in the substances which he himself took and held in his hands,

taking the Bread and saying, “This is my Body,”

then taking the Wine, “This is my Blood.”

How amazing it is that we can see and touch and taste the living God,

dwelling in our very midst under the forms of bread and wine.

Secondly, in these words of Our Lord –

in the transformation of these common things of the earth

into the most Precious Body and Blood,

our Lord gives us nothing less than himself.

In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus gives us nothing less than himself.

I invite you for the rest of today and for the rest of the week

to really sit and ponder that – to meditate and pray with that.

Jesus – the active Word spoken at Creation –

Jesus, the Author of Life, God Incarnate –

Creator of the Worlds, and yet the man of Palestine –

Jesus, who healed the sick and the blind,

and made the lame to walk,

who showed us how to love one another,

and got down on his knees the night before his death

to wash the feet of his disciples –

Jesus, who was willing to undergo death for you and for me –

who in his rising to life opened for us the gates of eternal life –

Jesus, his body, soul, and divinity, in all its implications

is given to us.

Nothing less than himself.

And so, is it any wonder that we crave this food?

In consuming this food, we are fed with the Bread of Life,

the true Bread from Heaven which gives life to the world.

As Pope Francis said on the feast of Corpus Christi three years ago:

“In life, we constantly need to be fed: nourished not only with food,

but also with plans and affection, hopes and desires.

We hunger to be loved.

But the most pleasing compliments, the finest gifts,

and the most advanced technologies are not enough;

they never completely satisfy us.

The Eucharist is simple food, like bread,

yet it is the only food that satisfies, for there is no greater love.

There we encounter Jesus really; we share his life and we feel his love.”

My brothers and sisters,

that is why we obey his command to “Do this” –

his command to take material, common things of earth,

that they might be made holy,

and that we might encounter him, the Living God –

that the ordinary stuff of our lives might be offered and transformed –

that we in turn might be made holy and share in the divine life of God.

***That*** is what we do when we respond to his command to “Do this”

for the remembrance of him.

“Was ever another command so obeyed?”

Come – be fed.

Come, and experience Jesus and his love.

Come, receive and become what you truly are:

the Body of Christ, given for the world. Amen.