

Corpus Christi 2019 Year C SSP

Corpus Christi: We Are What We Eat

Genesis 14:18-20; I Corinthians 11:23-26; St Luke 9:11b-17

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

If you're on the Altar Guild or in the Corps of Acolytes at Saint Stephen's, or if you hang around the working sacristy behind the Lady Chapel and pay attention, you notice something important. Great care is taken regarding the vessels that will hold the consecrated bread and wine for the Eucharist. There are linen corporal for the chalice and paten to be placed on and purificators to cleanse the chalice after communion – which are then carefully washed. There is the piscina, down which any consecrated wine or water may be poured and will go straight into the earth. It was like this at my former parishes, and it gladdens my heart to witness it here.

All this care is to honor the Real Presence of Jesus Christ under the forms of the consecrated Bread and Wine in Holy Communion. The Book of Common Prayer honors this Objective Presence when it orders that the consecrated Bread and Wine is not to be returned to common use, but rather consumed or reserved for the Communion of the Absent (the homebound or the sick who cannot make it to church).

In the last fifty years there have been enormous ecumenical advances in understanding among the churches, especially among the Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Lutherans, who have a high appreciation for sacramental liturgy. And that big word from the Middle Ages, *Transubstantiation*, which was denounced in our Anglican Articles of Religion in the sixteenth century, has been unpacked in the twentieth to the satisfaction of the various parties involved. A short example will illustrate that anyone who believes in Christ's Objective Real Presence essentially embraces the notion of Transubstantiation.

If you were to send a consecrated Host to a chemist for analysis – as a mischievous Anglican Bishop did a century ago to tweak the High Churchmen of his time – what would you find? You would not find flesh and blood, you would find bread and wine. But that does not disprove Transubstantiation. The physical attributes are the “accidental” properties; the inner spiritual reality, the “substance,” is the unmeasurable Presence of the incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Lord. In fact, Saint Thomas Aquinas himself promoted Transubstantiation precisely to exclude the crude notion of the conversion of the physical properties, the “accidents,” from bread and wine into plasma and corpuscles. Our Article of Religion mistook the Doctrine for the error it was intended to exclude, equating “substance” (essence) with “accidents” (measurable properties). The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, about fifty years ago, reached substantial [pun intended] agreement on these matters in the Eucharist, concluding that, on this issue, there was no reason for the churches to be separated. Truly, as long as the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer are followed, we have a wide latitude for all who believe that Jesus Christ gives himself to us in Holy Communion.

Today we have a festival to celebrate the Body of Christ. What I want to say now is simple, and I’ll keep it short.

First, we are what we eat. When we eat and drink, as the Prayer of Humble Access puts it, the flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under those forms of bread and wine, our sinful bodies are made clean by the Lord’s Body and our souls are washed through his most precious Blood, and he dwells in us, and we dwell in him. We are what we eat.

Second, all that reverence that we devote to the Blessed Sacrament properly translates into courtesy, kindness, consideration, generosity, forgiveness, and in a word, love, for our fellow members of the Body of Christ. It is fitting that we wind up the Choir’s and the Sunday

School's terms on this day, because they are important organs of the Body of Christ, singing God's praises in the congregation and teaching God's Word to his children.

Third, the healthy life of the Body of Christ animates both our in-reach as a congregation and our outreach. When charity and generosity and all those attendant virtues thrive within the Body of Christ, along with reverence and devotion towards the Sacrament, things are HAPPY. This blessed happiness has a way of catching on, of being attractively contagious. It starts with horizontal grace right here in the Eucharist, as we exchange the Peace and receive the Sacrament alongside each other at the Altar Rail. It spills over into the classes and the various meetings of parish leaders. It flows up to the Coffee Hour and goes out the door. It prevails at the Soup Kitchen and feeding programs. It is infectious, and it cannot help growing the church in every way that it is possible to grow.

In CS Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, which are the counsels by a senior to a junior devil (Screwtape and Wormwood) to destroy the life of a particular soul, there is an apparent setback for the devils. The subject has become a Christian! So the first piece of advice Screwtape gives Wormwood is to get the subject to notice who are in the pews with him in church. He will notice their many annoying characteristics, and, so the advice goes, he will be derailed from his good intentions in no time.

I have been with you at Saint Stephens for less than a month. I have seen that our congregation is, yes, small, and, like you, I think it should grow. But I have been very impressed with the faithful remnant I see here, with your spirit and faithfulness all around. I see no reason why Saint Stephen's cannot grow and flourish, even by leaps and bounds. Of course, you need to call a good priest for your next Rector. But starting right now, we all have work to do to prepare for that momentous day. Work, and much prayer.

First, we need to renew the life of Jesus in our own souls. Clear out the rubbish and let the grace in. And as our relationship with the Lord, and within our own souls with their appetites and faculties, inspires virtues to strengthen and grow, then our personal and social relations will be enhanced. This advancing good health and order will open the door to peace and joy. And people, starting with ourselves, will not fail to notice.

Ave verum Corpus! Hail true Body. Dearly beloved in Christ, we are what we eat. We are the *Corpus Christi*.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.