

Embodiment

Corpus Christi (Year A)

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In the early centuries of the church, Christians had trouble explaining who Jesus Christ was. This is quite understandable, as they didn't have the benefit of church councils and creeds yet. They knew that he was God; they also knew that he was human; but how those two came together was logically puzzling. A number of them settled on the idea that Jesus Christ was God, who took on the appearance of a human. God seemed human so that God could relate to us and teach us how to be holy. This understanding was a legitimate attempt to explain Jesus Christ, but it was eventually declared heretical. The reasoning was because it didn't go far enough in affirming his full humanity. Jesus didn't just appear or seem human; he was human. The technical name for this heresy was Docetism.

While it is now easy to point the finger to these early Christians for short-changing the humanity of our Lord, the German theologian Fr. Karl Rahner made the comment that even today, many Christians are still mostly Docetists. We still treat him as if he hovered slightly over the earth, engaged, but never fully committed. This Docetism is perhaps most evident in our relationship to the Eucharist.

On this Corpus Christi weekend, we give thanks for the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ offered to us each time we come to mass. We believe that in this sacrament, the body and blood of Christ doesn't just hover; it is embodied. "My flesh is real food and

my blood real drink.” Yet, so often we don’t believe it. At best, we think it is just a spiritual presence.

The former archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, believed that the life of Jesus Christ demands embodiment in every historical age. In the 1970s, he said, “some want to keep a Gospel so disembodied that it doesn’t get involved at all in the world it must save. Christ is now in history. Christ is in the womb of the people. Christ is now bringing about the new heavens and the new earth.” (*The Violence of Love*, 102) Because of his insistence on Christ entering fully into humanity, he refused to simply be a ceremonial figurehead in the Catholic Church. Instead, he grounded himself in the poor, called the oppressors to conversion, and gave his life for the cause of justice. It is not without significance that he was martyred at the altar saying mass, the place where the Body and Blood of Christ were about to become embodied in the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital.

The Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist remind us of Jesus Christ’s fully humanity and his full desire to still become embodied in history.

Does my practice of religion take on flesh and blood?

A religion that is spiritual and otherworldly is a really nice idea, but it isn’t Christianity. Christianity is a religion that is meant to shape human history: flesh for the life of the world. Jesus Christ did not stay at a distance whenever he became human 2,000 years ago. So too, he does not stay at a distance whenever he becomes bread and wine today in this Holy Eucharist.