

# Reflections from the Upper Room:

**for the Pastoral Musician**

Sunday, June 7, 2020

## Reflections for The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)

By: Father George Farrell, *Pastor of the Catholic Community of St. Joseph, North Plainfield*



I'd say it's safe to say that church musicians are familiar with Beethoven's 5th - you know "da-da-da-DAH." Aside from those four all-too-familiar notes, it really is a neat piece of music. The last movement has a number of "fake-outs" that trick you into thinking it's over. There's a rich and quiet middle section. But still, there's the "da-da-da-DAH" which everyone knows.

Why bring this up on Corpus Christi? Today's feast was established in the Middle Ages to celebrate the reality of what we do on the altar every day. (Yes, we are the body of Christ, but I'm limited in space so I'll just reflect on the real presence in the elements). We do as Jesus did. We take

bread and wine and they, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the gift of the priesthood, become the transubstantiated Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. This isn't a symbol. Nor is it a merely ritualistic gesture. It's been the belief of our faith that this truly and really becomes, at the level of essence, the Presence of the Son of God. In other words, Jesus meant what He said: "Unless you eat my body and drink my blood you will have no life in you."

But we hear these words so often. We approach the Altar to receive Communion and we hear those four words: "The Body of Christ" or "The Blood of Christ." Like those first four notes of Beethoven's 5th, we sometimes don't go beyond them. This is the feast when we get that chance.

A recent poll reported that a good number of Catholics who responded didn't really believe that the bread and wine at Mass become Jesus. They saw it as a "meaningful sign" or a "spiritual thing." Why would this be important in a world where, it seems, the only thing religion should do is make people feel good about themselves?

If we believe that the essence of the Eucharist is a real change it makes a great difference. It means that God transforms His creation, and that includes us. No longer can we separate what we do from what we are. I can't say that there is a "God part" of my life, which is separate from any other. If we hold that the Eucharist is only a symbol, that the reality of Christ is not essentially present in the sacrament, then it won't be long before we find ways to separate our actions from our faith. But more seriously, we can miss the "source and summit" of our faith life.

Our faith has been formed and has led us to the truth that God dwells with us even when we don't dwell with Him. The presence of Jesus in the Eucharist isn't dependent on what we believe or don't believe. The grace of this profound and intimate moment isn't changed by the sinfulness of the priest (thank God!) or the quality of the Church decorations. The challenge in our modern church is to find again the ancient and orthodox teaching of the saints. This is the Catholic Eucharistic faith, which proclaims that greatest mystery in clear sight: that God is here. Any other basis of a spirituality is shaky at best. And it's most certainly a process of discovery and reflection. Like a great symphony, we need to get beyond the basic few notes.

Take whatever time you can make to reflect on what you receive. Let's see beyond the "da-da-da-DAH" to the great mystery right in front of us every time we celebrate our Eucharistic liturgies. As you make music, which will be a bit harder thanks to Covid-19 let us remember the words of St. Thomas Aquinas:

Tantum ergo Sacramentum  
    Veneremur cernui,  
Et antiquum documentum  
    Novo cedat ritui;  
Praestet fides supplementum,  
    Sensuum defectui.

## Selected Reflection Music

**Benediction: Tantum Ergo · Harry Hagan OSB**

**Journeysongs Third Edition: Volume 6**

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<https://youtu.be/5S0Xu5Sixn4>

## **Contributor Introduction**

Father George Farrell is the Pastor of the Catholic Community of St. Joseph, North Plainfield. He has long been an advocate for sacred music. Prior to being ordained to the priesthood, he has been a church organist and cantor.

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