

June 14, 2020 Feast of Corpus Christi Homily: The name of Edith Wharton is largely unfamiliar to most Americans today. She was a distinguished American novelist, and the first woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for literature. Born into wealth, she was a member of New York's aristocracy during the so-called "Gilded Age", the beginning of the Twentieth Century. As a socialite she enjoyed the company of the rich and famous around the world. Many of her stories focused on "high society", including the one that earned her international acclaim and a Pulitzer Prize, "The Age of Innocence". Some thirty years ago the novel was adapted for the screen by filmmaker Martin Scorsese. Many of the key scenes of the film were shot in our own City of Troy.

Wharton lived in a magnificent chateau in the South of France. Every year on the feast of Corpus Christi, she opened the gates of her estate to the local Catholic parish so that the faithful would have a proper place to celebrate the feast, which included a solemn procession. Although she herself was not Catholic, she observed something of great beauty when the priest carrying the monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament passed by her home.

For many centuries, there was one day of the year in which the streets of our cities and towns became the scene not of business and shopping, but of the joy and celebration that God is among us. It is the feast of "Corpus Christ", the body and blood of Christ. In the procession, we take Christ, present in the figure of bread, through the streets. It is a great and public blessing for our neighborhoods. Together, we walk with Him. He guides us towards the Kingdom of Heaven. God does not leave us alone on our journey through life but stays at our side and shows us the way.

I recall two songs from my youth which suggest the only way that is worthy of praise is to "Go your own Way" (Fleetwood Mac), and that "My Way" (Frank Sinatra) is the surest path to happiness. Such a philosophy of life runs contrary to the teaching of the One who identified Himself as "the Way" (Jn. 4:6).

In the ancient world, the Romans honored their victorious generals by holding triumphal processions on their return to Rome;

In the Gospels, Jesus entered the Holy City of Jerusalem in triumph, accompanied by Jewish pilgrims, including his disciples; and

On Holy Thursday, a procession accompanies Jesus in his sorrow and loneliness to the Mount of Olives.

In the procession of Corpus Christi, we accompany the Risen Christ on his journey throughout the World. We take him into our towns, villages and cities whenever we receive Holy Communion. We have received Our Lord and are one with Him.

There is a wonderful anecdote told about Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first Native American to be declared a saint by the Church. When she was a Protestant, she visited a Catholic shrine in Italy. When, during Mass, the priest elevated the host a young English tourist leaned toward her and in a loud, clear voice, said, "This is what they (Catholics) call the Real Presence." The young woman was horrified. Her heart trembled with shame and sorrow for the rude interruption of the Mass. Inexplicably, she fell to her

knees in adoration. It was the turning point in her long journey of conversion. She recognized the presence of her Lord in the Sacrament entrusted to the Catholic Church.

There is nothing in the world as beautiful as the Eucharist. Christ is brought close to us.

Recently, in New York City, amid violent protests, the exterior walls of St. Patrick's Cathedral were defaced by vile, obscene graffiti. The ugliness of the words was disturbing. But it is always a great consolation to all the members of the faithful that inside the majestic House of Worship Christ can be found in the tabernacle. He makes all of our churches beautiful.

Christ is "The Bread of Life".

Amen!