

Fr. Curtis Miller

June 13-14, 2020

Homily for Corpus Christi

Happy Corpus Christi, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus! As more of us are finally able to return to Mass and receive Jesus in the Eucharist, this is a perfect moment for us to celebrate this wonderful gift that God gives to us.

We begin with our first reading, from the Book of Deuteronomy, calling our minds back to when the Israelites were wandering in the desert, freed from slavery, but not yet arrived in the Promised Land. During their journey, the people became hungry and they complained. It's interesting to note that the reading tells us that God *allowed* them to be afflicted with hunger. Why would God do that on purpose? Wouldn't it have been better if God had just made an oversight which He quickly corrected, rather than intentionally let them suffer like that?

We might have moments in our lives when we think the same thing. Why does God allow me to suffer, to hunger, to not have everything I need? Doesn't God love me? Yes, He does. So why does He allow us to go hungry?

God also allows us to experience hunger, in various ways, so that we will know how hard it is, so that we will feel compassion for the hungry and work to provide for their needs. God allows some of us to go hungry so that others of us can provide food from the abundance that we have. Whenever we wonder why some people go hungry, God is whispering to us, asking us to go feed the hungry ourselves. I'm often reminded of the story of St. Katharine Drexel, a wealthy American heiress who complained to Pope Leo XIII that someone ought to help the Native Americans and African Americans in the United States, many of whom were suffering from poverty and hunger. The pope replied simply, "Why don't you go?" And so she did. St. Katharine gave up her fortune and became a missionary sister, serving Native Americans and African Americans.

And as I said, the hunger that we experience and that we ought to work to alleviate in our sisters and brothers is not just physical hunger for food. It is a hunger for compassion and companionship, for a listening ear and a caring heart, for spiritual nourishment and education, for helping hands and hearts (as some of our parishioners have aptly put it). We suffer times of isolation, loneliness, failure, and futility so that we can respond with greater love to others who suffer those hungers.

Returning to the Israelites in the desert, our reading from Deuteronomy continues by stating that God allowed them to experience hunger so that He could feed them with manna, the miraculous bread from heaven. If God had just provided them with enough provisions from the beginning, they probably would have just taken it for granted. But God had something more wonderful in store for them, miraculous food, so that He would not be feeding just their bodies, but also nourishing their souls.

For many of us, these past few months of the pandemic quarantine might have made us feel like the Israelites trudging across the desert, our bodies and souls wracked with hunger. Many of us endured (or are still enduring) financial hardship, and couldn't afford all the groceries we and our families needed. I was proud to see how many of you donated to our parish food shelf, or were involved in helping in other ways in our community.

For many of us, too, this was the longest time we went without coming here to Mass and receiving the Eucharist. It was a hard trial for many of us. (I was greatly privileged as a priest to be able to continue to celebrate Mass and receive the Eucharist, but I missed being able to share Christ with you and I felt your pain in not being able to receive Holy Communion).

Hopefully this experience, as hard as it was, helped us all to deepen our hunger for the Eucharist. Like the Israelites who hungered in the desert better appreciated the manna that God provided, so may we better appreciate the Eucharist. We shared in the experience of people around the world who don't get to receive the Eucharist regularly, either because of the shortage of priests or government persecution, and people in our own parish who are not healthy enough to attend Mass. Now as we are able to receive the Eucharist, let's keep those people in our hearts, and pray for them as we receive Holy Communion, that they too may feel the presence of Jesus in their souls.

Many recent surveys of Catholics indicate that many do not understand the Church's teaching that the Eucharist is not a mere symbol, but is really, truly the Body and Blood of Jesus. At the Last Supper, when Jesus took bread and wine, blest them, and gave them to His disciples, He said, "This is My Body. This is My Blood. Do this in memory of Me." Jesus, the Son of God, has the power and authority to perform this miracle, and He has the love to want to offer Himself to each one of us, down through the centuries. Nothing is impossible for the God Who created the universe, even a miracle as incredible as changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. That is the miracle that God performs here on this altar at every Mass. That is the act of love that Jesus offers you today, the gift of His very self to you.