

Today we are celebrating the solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, or Corpus Christi. This day has special significance for me in a couple of ways. First, it was my faith that Jesus is truly present--body, blood, soul and divinity--in the Eucharist that made me want to become Catholic. This wasn't something that I figured out in my head, it came to me in my heart...mainly by praying in the Adoration Chapel at Sacred Heart Parish in Medford. So that's the first thing: if it wasn't for the Eucharist, I wouldn't be Catholic. The second thing about Corpus Christi is that in 2018, the year that I was ordained, it fell on June 3rd, the day after my ordination, which means that the Corpus Christi Mass was the first Mass I ever celebrated as the main celebrant. And I celebrated that Mass in Medford a few yards from that Adoration chapel where I first came to believe in the True Presence. Dates matter. There are no coincidences with God. It was the Eucharist that drew me to the Church and God arranged it so that I would celebrate my first Mass of thanksgiving in my home parish on the solemnity dedicated to the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Many of our Protestant brothers and sisters believe that the Eucharist is purely symbolic. Some Protestants, such as Lutherans, believe that Jesus is present in the eucharist alongside the bread and wine; this is called consubstantiation and it is what Martin Luther himself believed. As Catholics, we believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist through transubstantiation which means that the bread and wine totally become the flesh and blood of Jesus. It may look like bread and wine, but the inner reality, whatever it is that makes bread bread and wine wine have been miraculously transformed into Christ. The outer appearance remains the same but the inner reality has been transformed. Don't try to understand it in your head; you can only begin to understand it in your heart through prayer. As Catholics, we believe that when Jesus spoke the words that we heard today from Mark's gospel, he meant for us to take them literally: "This IS my body. This IS my blood." We have believed this since the earliest days of the church. Jesus told us in John's gospel that if we want eternal life, we have to eat his flesh and drink his blood. It is through his true presence--body, blood, soul, and divinity--in the Eucharist that we now have access to the living food and water that will save us.

This ties into what I spoke about last weekend. I mentioned three of the four ways in which the ancient Church fathers proclaimed the gospel. Why is there something instead of nothing? Because God created everything; he created it out of love; and everything he created is good. What happened? We have been captured

by the enemy and he is holding the world hostage. What has God done about it? God wants his world back, so he launched a rescue mission. Jesus came to save us and part of this rescue plan involved giving us the means to eat the bread of life, which is his flesh and blood. I ended with this last weekend as sort of a cliffhanger, but I sincerely hope it wasn't much of a mystery. The rescue mission is the incarnation. The Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary and became man in order--as Saint John tells us in one of his letters--to destroy the works of the devil.

Earlier I said that dates matter. I see an important connection between today's solemnity and today's date on the calendar. What I am about to say about this connection might make some people mad, but I have had people mad at me all week so I don't care anymore. My response to those people who won't like the direction I am headed is this: With all due respect, I am concerned that many people have never been told...or have forgotten...or just don't believe...that we are engaged in a war. It may be a spiritual war, but the effects are no less real. And the enemy we are fighting is real. With all due respect to the priest who said that Satan is a symbol of evil, he is wrong. Satan is not a symbol. He is real. Jesus himself speaks of Satan as being real. Neither is Satan like a spoiled child who, if we show him some love, will come back and be good and behave himself. Satan wants to destroy us because he hates God and everything God loves, especially us. God cannot be defeated, so Satan is going after those whom God loves...and, yes, some souls will be destroyed. Jesus himself tells us this. The war and the enemy and the destruction they cause are real.

What is significant about the date on today's calendar, June 6th? Today is the seventy-seventh anniversary of the allied invasion of Normandy which was part of the effort to take back Europe from the Nazis during World War 2. If you look at a simplified military map of France in the days following D-Day you will see streams of arrows radiating out from the five beachheads along the coast of Normandy. Those arrows represent troops moving off the beaches and spreading out across western Europe to free people who were being held captive by a cruel oppressor.

Fully acknowledging the horrors and tragedies of any war, and acknowledging that in every war horrible things happen to innocent people, I cannot help but see a connection between the forces fighting for the freedom of Europe and God's rescue mission. God sent his son on a rescue mission to free us

from being enslaved to an oppressor infinitely worse than any other tyrant that the world has ever known. Jesus came to fight for us.

The Eucharist is supposed to be reserved in every Catholic Church around the world. Because of the true presence of Christ, every one of those churches, including ours, is like a little beachhead from which the forces of light are marching forth. And every time that we receive Jesus in Holy Communion we become soldiers of light. Today in Portland, possibly right now, Archbishop Sample is carrying the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist into the downtown blocks which have been the site of so much violence and destruction. In a very real way, Jesus is leading his forces of light out into a world held captive in the darkness.

The good world that God created has been corrupted by sin. God sent his son into the world to destroy the works of the devil and rescue us. We have been rescued. That is what happened on the cross! The crucifix is the sign of our redemption. Jesus could not and cannot be defeated. The war has already been won. But just like Hitler in Europe, the devil doesn't want to give up, so the battles go on.

The question for us today, the fourth question in the proclamation of the gospel is, having been rescued, how will I respond? We are called to be soldiers of light. We have been invited to follow the banner of Christ. How will you respond?