

**Homily for Corpus Christi Mass and Procession
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

June 11, 2023

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear priests, deacons, and brothers and sisters in Christ:

On the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, known by its Latin name as *Corpus Christi*, Catholics all over the world join together in the ancient tradition of carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession, not only as a sign of our common faith, devotion and adoration of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist, but also as a witness to the fact that Christ is also present in our world. He does not remain hidden in the tabernacles of our churches, but comes into our lives, into our very hearts and souls, each time we receive Him in the Eucharist.

As Moses reminded the people to remember the Lord and all the marvelous deeds He did for them in leading them out of slavery in Egypt and feeding them with manna in the desert, as we go out into the world we are to remember the Lord and give thanks for all that He has done for us in leading us out of slavery to sin and into the promise of eternal life, which He

promises through the gift of His Body and Blood. We are to make Him manifest in the world through our lives, our faith, and our good works.

Corpus Christi celebrates the presence of Jesus in the mystery of the Eucharist, His presence among us under the appearance of bread and wine. How is it possible, nearly two thousand years after His death, that Jesus is with us in this way? How do we know it is Him?

When Jesus rose from the dead, He was the same as before, but different. He could still talk, eat, walk, teach, and work miracles; but now He could appear to His disciples who were cowering in a locked room; now He would hand his mission on to them; now He would ascend to His Father, and give them his Holy Spirit. It is this risen Lord, unconstrained by the ordinary laws of nature, who is present in the Eucharist, to nourish and save his people.

If we do not immediately recognize Him, we are in good company: Mary thought He was the gardener, early in the morning on the first day of the week; the disciples thought He was a ghost, until He ate a piece of grilled fish; the travellers on the road to Emmaus thought He was a well-informed stranger. It is here in this last story that we have a clue as to how we will

recognize Him. We study the prophecies about Him; we listen to His teachings about his death and resurrection; we ponder the Last Supper when He says, “this is my body” and “this is my blood”; and we hear His words in Saint John’s Gospel where He tells us we are to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man – Jesus Himself. Putting all this together, when we celebrate the Eucharist in His memory, we can recognize that Jesus is truly with us, and we worship and rejoice. Our faith helps us to see what our eyes alone cannot.

Knowing he is so close to us in the Eucharist gives a focus to our lives that is both here and now and in the future; both tangible, appearing as bread and wine, and intangible – this is no ordinary bread and wine, but the flesh and blood of the Lord, the risen Lord. This is for us comfort, consolation, hope of eternal life, a constant call to be united with each other, a challenge to be worthy of His presence, an invitation to share with others the news that He is very close.

Given the great gift of Himself that Our Lord gave to us in the Eucharist, it is hard to understand why, according to polls, more than two-thirds of Catholic do not attend Mass every Sunday. The only possible

explanation is that they do not understand or appreciate this great Sacrament.

Some people, for example, claim that they do not get anything out of the Mass. This is the first misunderstanding, since going to Mass on Sunday is not first and foremost what we get out of doing so, but what we owe to God, namely, we owe it to God to give Him worship, praise, and thanksgiving. This obligation to go to Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation is stated not only in the Third Commandment of the Decalogue about keeping holy the Sabbath and the precept of the Church that specifies this obligation as a law of the Church, but also is owed to God as a matter of justice. Saint Thomas Aquinas defined justice as “a habit whereby man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will.” Right worship is due to God as a matter that we owe to Him as a matter of justice, if for no other reason than to thank Him for our lives and the gifts of His creation.

Those who say they get nothing out of coming to Mass also do not apparently understand and appreciate the meaning of the Eucharist as the Sacrament where Christ gives Himself to us in His Real Presence that we receive in Holy Communion. What more could we ask for or expect to get

out of going to Mass than the gift of God Himself? Those who understand and appreciate this great gift of receiving the Real Presence of Christ into our hearts every time we receive Holy Communion will be eager to go to Mass and receive the Eucharist regardless of whether this is required as a matter of obligation. That is why we have this annual celebration of *Corpus Christi*, rejoicing in the great gift of this Sacrament that Christ has given to us.

At the end of this Mass, we will carry the Blessed Sacrament in procession inside the Cathedral due to the rain this morning. This year's celebration of *Corpus Christi* continues the three-year Eucharistic Revival that began one year ago here in the United States. The mission of the Eucharistic Revival is "to renew the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist."

Here in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, we are observing a Year of the Eucharist, which began on December 8, 2022, and will end on December 8, 2023. The highlight of our diocesan Year of the Eucharist will be our Centennial Celebration on October 28, 2023, marking one hundred years since the transfer of our Diocesan See from Alton to Springfield. This Centennial celebration will be held at the Bank of Springfield Convention

Center in Springfield, which holds 7,000 people. One of our featured speakers will be Dr. Scott Hahn, Professor of Biblical Theology and the New Evangelization at the Franciscan University of Steubenville in Steubenville, Ohio, who will address the relationship of the Eucharist in the life of Christian discipleship.

The culmination of the Eucharistic Revival will be the National Eucharistic Congress, to be held in Indianapolis from July 17 to 21, 2024. At this historic event, more than 80,000 Catholics of all ages from every diocese in the United States are expected to gather at the Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis to worship our Risen Lord in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Eucharistic processions will come across the country from the four corners of the United to converge in Indianapolis. The western leg starting in San Francisco will come through our diocese from July 8th to July 12th next year in 2024. The itinerary with the times and locations along the way are still in the planning stages and will be announced soon.

Following the National Eucharistic Congress in the summer of 2024, the “Year of Going Out On Mission” will take place from July 21, 2024, through Pentecost of 2025. The goal is to foster an increase not only in

appreciation for the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, but an increase as well in the number of people attending Mass every Sunday. We pray that the Holy Spirit will enkindle a missionary fire in the heart of our nation as we reconsecrate ourselves to the source and summit of our faith.

May God give us this grace. Amen.