

CORPUS CHRISTI

The Feast of Corpus Christi was instituted by Pope Urban 1V in 1264. Shortly before this, the church had introduced the word 'transubstantiation' when formulating the doctrine that the Bread and Wine were consecrated really and truly into the Body and Blood of Christ at every Mass. Around this time quite a number of heretical views were circulating and the feast was instituted to help the catholic faithful re-affirm their faith.

In later centuries elaborate processions of the Blessed Sacrament were associated with this feast. It gave the faithful an opportunity to bear public witness to their faith against the backdrop of the 16th century reformers who denied the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. On this point, our hoped-for unity with other Christian denominations will come about only when there is a convergence of faith regarding the Eucharistic Presence. Ecumenism doesn't come about by filtering out fundamental doctrines for the sake of good public relations with other churches important as this may be.

The consecrated Bread you receive is not just a symbol of Christ's Presence as these churches teach - it is Christ Himself. This teaching was firmly held by the church from the beginning and rooted in Scripture. Holy Communion is a person to person meeting with Jesus my Lord and Saviour.

When Billy Graham and like minded evangelists want people to declare their faith in Jesus, they usually ask them to come down to the front of the auditorium and make a public commitment to Jesus, their Lord and Saviour which is a good thing. Catholics, on the other hand, declare their faith in Jesus by coming to Mass every Sunday and receiving him worthily in Holy Communion. It presupposes that we are trying our best with the grace of God to live good Christian lives in line with His commandments and the gospel. If we have broken any one of the commandments in a serious way, private confession is in

order before we receive Holy Communion. A generic confession of sin doesn't suffice. Those who get married outside the Church or who live together or who are in an illicit relationship, even though not living together, should not receive Holy Communion until they have first been reconciled with God and His church in the Sacrament of Penance. Parents are asked to give good example to their children in this regard.

For Catholics, unanimity in faith and morals and receiving Holy Communion cannot be separated. For this reason there cannot be inter-communion between catholic and churches of the reformation because there is not unanimity of belief on this central tenet of our faith. Ecumenism is not about 'papering over the cracks'.

If it weren't for the fact that we are weak human beings, we wouldn't need the Eucharist. In Holy Communion we draw on His strength to enable us live as he taught and get to Heaven. Jesus said: 'He who receives me in Holy Communion will draw life from me'.

So, on this feast of the Body and Blood of Christ we renew our faith and devotion in the real presence of Christ at Mass. He is the 'living Bread come down from Heaven'.

Questions

1. Processions of the Blessed Sacrament were common, at least in Ireland, on the Feast of Corpus Christi when we were children. Discuss

2. In Ecumenical dialogue especially at a diocesan or even parish level should we be more vociferous about a catholic belief in the 'real presence' of Christ in the Eucharist especially when most of our separated Brethren don't share the same belief about the Eucharist as we do, or at least as we should do? Discuss

3. *People don't seem to talk about it these days, even clergy, but generally speaking people who 'live together' are asked to refrain from receiving Holy Communion. The same applies to Catholics who have married 'outside the church'. Do you think it's high time for people to make up their own minds on this matter or should we be even more firm about it? Discuss*

4. *Maintaining a reverential silence in church before Mass seems to be on the wane! Discuss*