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All Saints Parish, Quincy, Illinois  
29 May 2005

The Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* (A)  
First Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving

My dear brother priests and deacons, my dear family, my dear friends in Christ:  
the Lord give you peace!

Today we have come for a great variety of reasons. Some have come to see their relative a priest. Some have come to see an old friend or a new one. Some have come, perhaps, for Mass later in the day and have slept in – I know I did. Some have come to see a new priest. Some have come to celebrate their joy and faith at the ordination of seven priests for our Diocese. Some have come to thank our Eucharistic Lord for his gift given on the Cross, which he offers to us each day.

Whatever our reason for coming here today, I can safely say that we have not come for me. I am not the purpose for our gathering here today. We have come to celebrate – to make much of – not me, but of the marvelous gift of the Body and Blood of the Lord Christ and of his gift of the holy priesthood. His gift of His true Body and Blood is our reason for gathering because he has commanded us to do so in order that we might “eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood” (John 6:53) and “have life because of [him]” (John 6:56).

What a great and profound gift it is for me to celebrate my First Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving on this the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* in this Year of the Eucharist given us by our beloved Pope John Paul II. How fitting it is for the ordination of seven priests

to take place during the year and particularly during the weekend when we turn our gaze with greater focus and intensity upon the Body and Blood of the Lord! The priest is ordained to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, to celebrate the Eucharistic Liturgy and so to make Christ present to his people until he comes again in glory. The two occasions of this most joyous of days – *Corpus Christi* and my first Mass – demonstrate in a tangible way the necessity of the priesthood for the Eucharist and of the Eucharist for the priesthood. Christ has given us these inseparable and indispensable gifts so that he might always be with us.

Although our lives are marked with many days of blessed festivity such as today, we know that this pilgrimage of earthly life is no easy journey. It is marked with difficulty and with adversity and particularly so because we seek to follow “the way, the truth, and the life” (). As those who take up the name “Christian” we must also take up the cross like our Lord and with Simon for he says, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Following after Christ Jesus is no easy venture, but is one filled with joy and sadness, success and failure, but we know that the ultimate victory is his so we come after him with confidence, but we are not strong enough on our own.

As we carry the cross, willingly or no, there are times when it feels that the Lord has abandoned us. Try as we might there are moments when we cannot sense the presence of God in our lives and it seems that we have been left alone and forsaken by God. The Israelites felt this way as they wandered – seemingly aimlessly – through the wilderness and so they complained to Moses. Moses went to the Lord who then gave

the people water from the rock and manna from heaven as their food and drink. Moses reminded the people that God had always been with them:

“Do not forget the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery; who guided you through the vast and terrible desert with its seraph serpents and scorpions, its parched and waterless ground; who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock and fed you in the desert with manna, a food unknown to your fathers” (Deuteronomy 8:14-16).

This manna was a sign for the people that God was with them even and especially in their struggles and adversities; that he had not left them alone. God himself fed them and sustained them on their journey and gave them the strength they needed from him because they were not strong enough on their own. But as wondrous as this bread was they “ate and still died” (John 6:49). This bread, this manna, could not give them the life and peace we seek.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus felt this alone-ness as well, as though God had orphaned them. Without knowing it, they pleaded with the Lord, with the one with whom they had walked, urging him, “Stay with us” (Luke 24:29). He does stay with them, he breaks the bread with them, and “in the breaking of the bread” they realize the presence of Jesus in their midst (Luke 24:). Through his gift of his Body and Blood Jesus remains with his disciples who cannot live without him or possibly make the journey.

Who among us has not uttered these simple and heart-wrenching words: “Stay with us, Lord”? We cry out and beg him to stay with us because we cannot bear to be left alone, we cannot live without the presence of God, we cannot live abandoned and

orphaned. St. Augustine said it so well: "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you." We search and we grope for life, for peace, for meaning, and we are ill at ease until we find the Lord and stay with him. Unless we "seek the Lord" all of our searching will be in vain and our loneliness and heartache will only increase. We are made by the Lord, we are made for him and until we rest in him we will never rest securely. The one who gave his life for us hears our prayers and our cries and answers us in our distress. In their confusion, he says to the Apostles, "This is my Body", "This is my blood", and "Do this in memory of me."

Through the Holy Eucharist the Lord remains with us; he is near to us and is in our midst. Never is he absent! He has not abandoned us or left us orphaned! He is always present to sustain us, to comfort us, to strengthen us! "As we eat his Body which he gave for us we grow in strength. As we drink his Blood which he poured out for us we are washed clean" (Preface 47). Through the ministry of the priest, who acts in the person of Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit the bread and wine are transformed into the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ the Lord that we might receive him, that he might be near to us, and so that we might "live forever" in him (John 6:58).

Through our sharing in the Eucharist, by partaking of "the antidote to death and the medicine of immortality" as St. Ignatius of Antioch called it - and by living a life worthy of so great and marvelous a gift - we receive the pledge of the everlasting life of heaven. We will be in the presence of God forever, standing around his throne in humble and joyful adoration and praise. Stay with us, Lord! In gazing up in wonder

on the one who created us, all of our deepest desires and longings shall be fulfilled and we shall forever be at peace. In the Eucharistic liturgy we stand already in the great hall of heaven before the throne of God. The great King of all the earth descends from his throne and enters into us through the Body and Blood of Christ. St. Francis of Assisi put it this way:

See, daily He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne into the womb of the Virgin; daily He comes to us in a humble form; daily He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest. And as He appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now He reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread. And as He appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now He reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed Him to be God as they contemplated Him with the eyes of faith, so, as we see bread and wine with [our] bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be His most holy Body and Blood living and true.<sup>1</sup>

Christ calls us to form one body with he himself as our head and it is the Eucharist which forms us into one body and which is the ultimate sign of our unity. As St. Paul asks, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (I Corinthians 10:16-17).

It is Christ himself who unites us and binds us together. Through his Body and Blood he forms us into himself so that it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. In Baptism we are configured in Christ and we promise to grow in union with him and in the Eucharist this union is fostered and strengthened.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Francis of Assisi, *The Admonitions* 1.16-21.

In this Holy Communion, we, then, are the Body of Christ; he is present with us always. "If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord", says St. Augustine; "it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond 'Amen' ('yes, it is true') and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, 'the Body of Christ' and respond 'Amen' ('yes, it is true'). Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your *Amen* may be true."

Having become members of the Body of Christ, Jesus is present with us in a most intimate and miraculous fashion. We take him into ourselves and he transforms not himself into us but rather he changes us into him; we become his Mystical Body and are united to him. As we eat his Body and drink his Blood we truly can rest in him for he is closer to us than we know. He is always present to us because we have become his Body; we are truly united with him. "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you." "Stay with us, Lord!"