

Today we celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi, the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. "Body and Blood of Jesus Christ." This sounds rather graphic and indeed it is. When we think of Jesus' Body and Blood, our first thought may be drawn to the Crucifixion, where Jesus' tortured, bruised, and bloody body was crucified before the whole world. As gruesome as this was, it was Jesus' final testament of love for a fallen humanity (yes you and me) which he had come to save. And save it He did.

Jesus' death on the cross satisfied the debt of rebellious humanity against God who had loved us into being. Jesus became one of us, so that he might lift rebellious humanity from its curse of death and just damnation. This only could have been achieved by God the Son, taking on human flesh, our flesh, our being, and raising it to where we could never raise it ourselves.

The feast of Corpus Christi is our celebration of Jesus becoming our own flesh and blood and raising it to divine status. Let us be clear, this is through the action and person of Jesus; not us. While this miracle could be held out there for us on some ethereal plane, Jesus allows us to “step into and experience” this reality on physical and repeatable basis. This is because God never wants us to be far from him. Rather, God wants us to always be close to him and his presence with humanity.

He achieves this through the Eucharist; the very presence of Jesus, God in human flesh, made manifest under the appearance of bread and wine, consecrated at this and every other altar throughout the world. The Eucharist is the gift of Christ's redemptive sacrifice at Calvary, made present for us to partake of and share in at every Mass. There is truly no greater gift humanity can receive or participate in.

This belief and teaching comes from Jesus himself in the Gospels. Now, some might say that this is an invention by the Church, something that developed over a period of time. But nothing could be further from the truth. As early as 150 AD, some fifty years after the last gospel was written, we have testimony from the Christian community that this understanding and practice was already in place.

Such testimony comes from those like St. Justin Martyr who wrote around 150 AD explaining the practices of the Early Church. Here he says: “This food we call Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us.”

“For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Savior being incarnate by God’s word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus. For the apostles in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, thus handed down what was commanded them: that Jesus, taking bread and having given thanks, said, “Do this for my memorial, this is my body”; and likewise taking the cup and giving thanks he said, “This is my blood”; and gave it to them.”

There are many other such Early Church recollections and explanations. Suffice it to say, the understanding and celebration of the Eucharist as Jesus' body, blood, soul, and divinity, made present for us in the consecrated bread and wine, is one that has been a part of the Church since its infancy. This was Jesus' assurance to his apostles and the Church that He would always be physically and spiritually present to his beloved. Today we celebrate and glorify Him for this great gift, which allows us to never be far from Him who is our light, truth, and salvation.