

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST – CORPUS CHRISTI

From THE DIRECTORY ON POPULAR PIETY -

www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Seasons/Documents/OTPP.shtml#Corpus_Christi

160. The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is observed on the Thursday (on the Sunday in England & Wales) following on the solemnity of the Most Blessed Trinity. This feast is both a doctrinal and cultic response to heretical teaching on the mystery of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the apogee of an ardent devotional movement concentrated on the Sacrament of the Altar. It was extended to the entire Latin Church by Urban IV in 1264.

Popular piety encouraged the process that led to the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi, which reciprocally inspired the development of new forms of Eucharistic piety among the people of God.

For centuries, the celebration of Corpus Christi remained the principal point of popular piety's concentration on the Eucharist. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, faith, in reaction to various forms of protestantism, and culture (art, folklore and literature) coalesced in developing lively and significant expressions Eucharistic devotion in popular piety.



161. Eucharistic devotion, which is so deeply rooted in the Christian faithful, must integrate two basic principles:

- the supreme reference point for Eucharistic devotion is the Lord's Passover; the Pasch as understood by the Fathers, is the feast of Easter, while the Eucharist is before all else the celebration of Paschal Mystery or of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ;
- all forms of Eucharistic devotion must have an intrinsic reference to the Eucharistic Sacrifice, or dispose the faithful for its celebration, or prolong the worship which is essential to that Sacrifice.

Hence, the *Rituale Romanum* states "The faithful, when worshipping Christ present in the Sacrament of the Altar, should recall that this presence comes from the Sacrifice of the Eucharist, and tends towards sacramental and spiritual communion".¹⁶⁹

162. The Corpus Christi procession represents the typical form of an Eucharistic procession. It is a prolongation of the celebration of the Eucharist: immediately after Mass, the Sacred Host, consecrated during the Mass, is borne out of the Church for the Christian faithful "to make public profession of faith and worship of the Most Blessed Sacrament".¹⁷⁰

The faithful understand and appreciate the values inherent in the procession: they are aware of being "the People of God", journeying with the Lord, and proclaiming faith in him who has become truly "God-amongst-us".

It is necessary however to ensure that the norms governing processions be observed,¹⁷¹ especially those ensuring respect for the dignity and reverence of the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁷² It is also necessary to ensure that the typical elements of popular piety accompanying the procession, such as the decoration of the streets and windows with flowers and the hymns and prayers used during the procession, truly "lead all to manifest their faith in Christ, and to give praise to the Lord",¹⁷³ and exclude any forms of competition.

163. The Eucharistic procession is normally concluded by a blessing with the Blessed Sacrament. In the specific case of the Corpus Christi procession, the solemn blessing with the Blessed Sacrament concludes the entire celebration: the usual blessing by the priest is replaced by the blessing with the Blessed Sacrament. It is important that the faithful understand that this blessing is not an independent form of Eucharistic piety, but the end of a prolonged act of worship. Hence, liturgical norms prohibit "exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for the purpose of giving the blessing".¹⁷⁴

Eucharistic Adoration

164. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is a form of Eucharistic cult which is particularly widespread in the Church and earnestly recommended to her Pastors and faithful. Its initial form derives from Holy Thursday and the altar of repose, following the celebration of the *Coena Domini* (*The Lord's Supper*) Mass. This adoration is a most apt way of expressing the connection between the celebration of the memorial of the Lord's Sacrifice and his continued presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. The reservation of the Sacred Species, so as to be able to administer Viaticum to the sick at any time,

encouraged the practice among the faithful of recollection before the tabernacle and to worship Christ present in the Sacrament.¹⁷⁵

Indeed, this worship of adoration has a sound and firm foundation," [109] especially since faith in the Lord's real presence has as its natural consequence the outward and public manifestation of that belief. Therefore, the devotion prompting the faithful to visit the blessed sacrament draws them into an ever deeper share in the paschal mystery and leads them to respond gratefully to the gift of him who through his humanity constantly pours divine life into the members of his Body. [110] Abiding with Christ the Lord, they enjoy his intimate friendship and pour out their hearts before him for themselves and for those dear to them and they pray for the peace and salvation of the world. Offering their entire lives with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit, they derive from this sublime colloquy an increase of faith, hope, and charity. Thus they foster those right dispositions that enable them with due devotion to celebrate the memorial of the Lord and receive frequently the bread given us by the Father.¹⁷⁶

165. In adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, which can take different forms, several elements deriving from the Liturgy and from popular piety come together and it is not always easy to determine their limits:¹⁷⁷

- a simple visit to the Blessed Sacrament: a brief encounter with Christ inspired by faith in the real presence and characterized by silent prayer;
- adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed for a period of time in a monstrance or pyx in accordance with liturgical norm;¹⁷⁸
- perpetual adoration or the Quarantore, involving an entire religious community, or Eucharistic association, or parish, which is usually an occasion for various expressions of Eucharistic piety.¹⁷⁹

The faithful should be encouraged to read the Scriptures during these periods of adoration, since they afford an unrivalled source of prayer. Suitable hymns and canticles based on those of the Liturgy of the Hours and the liturgical seasons could also be encouraged, as well as periods of silent prayer and reflection. Gradually, the faithful should be encouraged not to do other devotional exercises during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁸⁰ Given the close relationship between Christ and Our Lady, the rosary can always be of assistance in giving prayer a Christological orientation, since it contains meditation of the Incarnation and the Redemption.¹⁸¹

*At the time he was betrayed and entered willingly into his Passion,
he took bread and, giving thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you.
In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took the chalice and, once more giving thanks, he gave it
to his disciples, saying:
Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and
eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in memory of me.
(Eucharistic Prayer 2)*