

Homily – Corpus Christi, Luke 9: 11-17
18th/ 19th June 2022

Brennan Manning, an American Franciscan priest, tells this story of his mother, a lady in her mid-seventies in Brooklyn. Mrs. Manning's day centred on her daily Eucharist. Because she began her voluntary stint at a drug detoxification centre each morning at 7:30 AM., the only Mass she could reach was at 5:30 AM. Across the road from her, lived a very successful lawyer, in his mid-thirties, married with two children. The man had no religion and was particularly critical of daily Church-goers. Driving home from a late party at 5 am one January morning, the roads glassy with ice, and he said to his wife: "I bet that old hag won't be out this morning", referring to Mrs. Manning. But to his shock, there she was on hands and knees negotiating the hill up to the Church. He went home, tried to sleep, but could not. Around 9 am he rose, went to the local presbytery and asked to see a priest. "Padre/ Father," he said, "I am not one of yours. I have no religion. But could you tell me what you have there that can make an old woman crawl up here on hands and knees on an icy morning?" Thus, began his conversion along with his wife and family. — Mrs. Manning was one of those people who never studied deep religious books, never knew the big theological words, but she knew what it is to meet Jesus

in Holy Communion. She knew, ‘Jesus Christ is the Bread of life’. And what more could she want?

Well! Today, we celebrate the solemn feast of *Corpus Christi*: The feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. This Solemnity is three feasts in one: the feast of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the feast of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and the feast of the Real Presence of Jesus in this Sacrament. It is in fact an opportunity that the Church gives us every year to simply pause and reflect on the great gift that we have in the Eucharist.

And today’s Scripture readings contain three themes: the Eucharist as a blessing or praise of God (action of Melchizedek that we heard in the First Reading, Gn 14:18-20), the Eucharist as a memorial of what Jesus did at the Last Supper (as we listened to in the 2nd Reading, 1 Cor 11:23-26) and the Eucharist as food for the multitudes (as given in the Gospel, Lk 9:11-17). Well, the never-ending supply of bread with which Jesus fed the multitude prefigured his own Body, the consecrated Bread that sustains us until He comes again.

Now, one of the most influential persons in the life of Pope Francis, was his grandmother, ‘Rosa’, says the Holy Father. Pope Francis recollects the words of his grandmother who used to often tell him: “if you have any difficulties in life, you should kneel before the tabernacle

and remind yourself that it contains the Real Presence of the Crucified Lord who offered himself totally for your sake”. And that’s the truth.

Well! Reflecting on my own life, I should admit in all honesty, that without the faith in the Eucharist that my parents had handed on to me and which I always kept burning in my life, I don’t think I will probably be here celebrating the Eucharist with you and for you today. This is really a gift that keeps on giving.

I can still very clearly remember my boyhood days in which my mother used to take us to the Church every day for the Holy Mass. She taught us to love the Eucharist and reverence it. Probably because of the love for the Eucharist that she instilled in me, just after my Secondary School at the age of 15 in 1991, I joined the seminary with my boyhood dream of becoming a priest. And when I was ordained a priest in 2007 after 17 years of formation, the only prayer I had made to God was this that I might have the grace to love the Holy Eucharist and be able to celebrate the Eucharist with great devotion, trust and faith. And I am convinced even to this day with all my unworthiness as a priest, with all my shortcomings and failures, God still gives me the grace to love this Sacrament and celebrate it with deep faith.

In one of his sermons, St. Augustine spoke about the relationship between the Eucharist and the believer who receives it. When we come forward, the Minister says: “Body of Christ”, and we respond, “Amen”, “so be it”, “I believe”. Well! Augustine said: it would also be appropriate for the minister to say; “Receive who you are, and become what you receive”. By this Augustine meant, ‘that the one who receives ‘the Eucharist’, ‘the Communion’, is in a sense already the body of Christ’ because this community of believers comprises itself into the body of Christ. It is a celebration of the Church and who we are.

Monsignor James Gaston, Pastor of ‘Mother of Sorrows Church’, Pennsylvania, United States was one day having a workshop with the Eucharistic ministers. And he asked this question to the group: “what is going on in communion during Mass? And one of them said: “The body of Christ comes forward to receive the body of Christ to go out to be the body of Christ”. Yes! We God’s people come forward to be nurtured by the body of Christ. But it doesn’t end there. We go out to be the body of Christ.

Yes, dear friends, the Eucharist opens us up: ‘to the whole of humanity, our brothers and sisters who are suffering, the hungry, the unemployed, the sick, the vulnerable, people living in poverty, victims of drugs and abuse, the violent, unbelievers... the list is endless. And

so, the invitation of the Lord today is this that we become Eucharist for others and be able to nourish others as Jesus nourishes us in the Eucharist. In the Old Testament God was in dialogue only with the Israelites. But now, through the Eucharist, through Jesus' Body and Blood, God is in dialogue with the whole of humanity.

Let me conclude my homily with a little incident that has made a deep impact on my life. And I have shared it here before. Several years ago, there was a Eucharistic congress in Philadelphia and there were various speakers and one of them was Pedro Arrupe who at that time was the head of the Jesuits, the 28th Superior General of the Society of Jesus. And to be precise, it was on August 2nd 1976, and Pedro Arrupe was addressing the thousands and thousands of people gathered there and he said this: that if anyone goes to bed hungry today, the Eucharist is incomplete. If there is hunger anywhere in the world, then our celebration of the Eucharist is somehow incomplete everywhere in the world”.

Well dear friends, there needs to be a connection with our worship and reception of the Eucharist inside the Church, and our commitment to meet the legitimate hungers of those in the world. Let the words of Augustine re-echo in our hearts and minds: “Receive who you are, and become what you receive”. God bless you all, **Amen.**

