

SOLEMNITY OF CORPUS CHRISTI

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The Institution of the Eucharist¹ happened, according to the four canonical Gospels, as follows: "While they were eating [the Passover meal], He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, 'Take it; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many!'"² Both Luke and Paul add the phrase, "Do this in remembrance of me,"³ while John⁴ includes the washing of feet of the Apostles, the new commandment, and Jesus' high priestly prayer (i.e., his farewell discourse) to the Father on behalf of his Church.

Our Catholic faith holds that the bread and wine become the living Christ. The Holy Eucharist has a threefold significance for us believers: first, it is a commemoration (the past made present) of the Lord's Passion, of His true sacrifice; second, it is a visible sign of our unity as a faith community, in which we are brought together through this sacrament to a holy communion (Christ present in and among us today – so we become Christ to others); and finally, it is a foreshadowing of our union with God beyond this life; hence, it is a *viaticum*, nourishment on our journey to heaven.⁵

Liturgically speaking, the Institution of the Eucharist is specially commemorated on Holy Thursday and celebrated at every Mass. However, given that there are other important elements being celebrated during Holy Thursday,⁶ in 1264 Pope Urban IV ordered an annual celebration of *Corpus Christi* in the Thursday next after Trinity Sunday.⁷ Pope Urban IV explained his decision with these words:

¹ I will use the term *Eucharist* here; however, the reader needs to be aware that there are many other names used to designate this wondrous reality, such as The Lord's Supper; The Breaking of Bread; The Eucharistic assembly (synaxis); The memorial of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection; The Holy Sacrifice | holy sacrifice of the Mass, sacrifice of praise, spiritual sacrifice, pure and holy sacrifice; The Holy and Divine Liturgy | the Sacred Mysteries, the Most Blessed Sacrament; Holy Communion | the holy things (ta hagia; sancta), the bread of angels, bread from heaven, medicine of immortality, viaticum; and Holy Mass (Missa). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part II, section 2, chapter 1, art. 3, nos. 1322-1419.

² Mk. 14:12-31; Mt. 26:17-30; Lk. 22:7-38.

³ Lk 22:19 and 1 Cor 11:24-25.

⁴ 13:1 - 17:26

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 73, a. 4.

⁶ "This is so because on Holy Thursday, the day on which the Lord himself instituted this Sacrament, the universal Church, occupied with the reconciliation of penitents, blessing the chrism, fulfilling the Commandments about the washing of the feet and many other such things, is not sufficiently free to celebrate so great a Sacrament." Pope Urban IV, *Transiturus de hoc mundo*, August 11, 1264.

⁷ Inspiration for the establishment of this celebration was given to Pope Urban IV by a Belgian nun named Juliana, Prioress of Mont Cornillon (1258), as well as by the miracle witnessed by the German priest Peter of Prague (1263) who, while celebrating Holy Mass above the tomb of St. Christina, he had barely spoken the words of consecration when blood started

Therefore, to strengthen and exalt the Catholic Faith, we decree that, besides the daily memory that the Church makes of this Sacrament, there be celebrated a more solemn and special annual memorial. Then let the hearts and mouths of all break forth in hymns of saving joy; then let faith sing, hope dance, charity exult, devotion applaud, the choir be jubilant, and purity delight. Then let each one with willing spirit and prompt will come together, laudably fulfilling his duties, celebrating the Solemnity of so great a Feast.⁸

Unfortunately, Pope Urban IV died shortly after the promulgation of his decree. Consequently, the universal observance of *Corpus Christi* did not take root until later.⁹

In summary, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, historically known as *Corpus Christi*, celebrates the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity and it is traditionally celebrated on the Thursday following the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity.

How to celebrate Corpus Christi during the Coronavirus crisis

As we celebrate Corpus Christi this year 2020, we are painfully aware of our inability to do so in the usual way. This year, there will be no processions, no crowds, and many of us will not even dare to go to Church to receive holy communion. Of course, we will continue participating in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist via media and receiving our Lord spiritually. However, is not there something else we can do to highlight this most important feast of our faith?

Here are some ideas to highlight this celebration:

1. Participate in the live-streamed celebration of the Holy Eucharist for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi at the Altar of the Chair in St Peter's Basilica on Sunday, 14 June 2020 at 9:45, Rome time. The Mass will be presided by Pope Francis.
2. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist will conclude with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction. Devote some time in silence to adore the Blessed Sacrament, either at the end of the Pope's celebration or at another convenient time during the day.

to seep from the consecrated Host and trickle over his hands onto the altar and the corporal. The linen corporal bearing the spots of blood is still reverently enshrined and exhibited in the Cathedral of Orvieto, Italy.

⁸ Pope Urban IV, *Transiturus de hoc mundo*, August 11, 1264.

⁹ Pope Clement V, *General Council of Vienne* (1311) and Pope John XXII.

3. Find videos of famous [processions of Corpus Christi](#) from around the world and use them both to learn about other cultures/peoples and to unite in spirit with this act of popular piety.

A special recommendation: read, meditate upon, memorize, and sing this famous hymn composed by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) for the Office of Corpus Christi. Here is a version in English <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fF2EI5Xq17I>

<p>Pange, lingua, gloriósi Córporis mystérium, Sanguínisque pretiósí, Quem in mundi prétium Fructus ventris generósi Rex effúdit géntium.</p>	<p>Sing, my tongue, the Savior's glory, Of His Flesh, the mystery sing; Of the Blood, all price exceeding, Shed by our Immortal King, Destined, for the world's redemption, From a noble Womb to spring.</p>
<p>Nobis datus, nobis natus Ex intácta Vírgine, Et in mundo conversátus, Sparso verbi sémine, Sui moras incolátus Míro clausit órđine.</p>	<p>Of a pure and spotless Virgin Born for us on earth below, He, as Man, with man conversing, Stayed, the seeds of truth to sow; Then He closed in solemn order Wondrously His Life of woe.</p>
<p>In suprémæ nocte coenæ Recúmbens cum frátribus Observáta lege plene Cibis in legálibus, Cibum turbæ duodénæ Se dat suis mánibus.</p>	<p>On the night of that Last Supper, Seated with His chosen band, He, the Paschal Victim eating, First fulfils the Law's command; Then as Food to all his brethren Gives Himself with His own Hand.</p>
<p>Verbum caro, panem verum Verbo carnem éfficit: Fitque sanguis Christi merum, Et si sensus déficit, Ad firmándum cor sincérum Sola fides súfficit.</p>	<p>Word-made-Flesh, the bread of nature By His Word to Flesh He turns; Wine into His Blood He changes: What though sense no change discerns. Only be the heart in earnest, Faith her lesson quickly learns.</p>
<p>Tantum ergo sacraméntum Venerémur cernui: Et antíquum documéntum Novo cedat rítui: Præstet fides suppleméntum Sénsuum deféctui.</p>	<p>Down in adoration falling, Lo, the sacred Host we hail, Lo, o'er ancient forms departing Newer rites of grace prevail: Faith for all defects supplying, When the feeble senses fail.</p>
<p>(continues below)</p>	

Genitóri, Genitóque
Laus et jubilátio,
Salus, honor, virtus quoque
Sit et benedíctio:
Procedénti ab utróque
Compar sit laudátio.
Amen. Alleluja.

To the Everlasting Father
And the Son who comes on high
With the Holy Ghost proceeding
Forth from each eternally,
Be salvation, honor, blessing,
Might and endless majesty.
Amen. Alleluia.