

Homily for Corpus Christi 2010

Where are we?
And what did we come here to do?

We are in church, in the house of God's people at prayer,
and we've come to celebrate the Eucharist:
we've come to be nourished by God's Word in the scriptures
and by the Body and Blood of Christ in Communion.

To remind us that we're God's people, born of the waters of baptism,
we blessed ourselves with holy water at the doors as we came in,
(You did, didn't you, bless yourselves? I hope so!
And parents, I hope you're helping your children to learn to do this!)

After blessing yourselves, you came into the church - on time I hope,
lest you miss a part of our prayer -
or a part of God's Word to you in the readings.
And you'd want to be on time, too, lest you disturb or distract others
who are already praying and listening to God's Word.

And coming to your pew, you did something to help you remember
that not only is this building a special place
but there are special places *within* this building:
namely: the altar, the crucifix, and the tabernacle:
• the altar, where we offer the sacrifice of the Mass
and come to receive the Body and Blood of Christ,
• at the foot of the image of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross,
• by the tabernacle where we reserve, we keep, the Body of Christ
for the Communion of the sick and dying and for our prayer.

So, to remember that there are holy places within this sacred building
you revered them all by genuflecting or bowing
towards the center of the sanctuary before taking a seat.

In a church where altar, cross and tabernacle are in a direct line,
this is easier to do,
but in our church the layout is different so the physical gesture
(a genuflection or a bow towards the sanctuary)
and your heart's attitude (reverence and respect) will do just fine.

Then, entering a pew, you took a few minutes, seated or on your knees,
to settle down and take a breath from the week past
and to speak quietly to God in prayer.
And you did your best to provide a quiet place for those around you,
others who need and want some quiet time for prayer.

The Lord is present to us not only in one another and in Communion, but also in the proclamation of the scriptures. So, we need to listen carefully, with open hearts and minds, when the Lord speaks to us: through the lectors reading the scriptures, the cantor leading us in singing the psalm, the deacon and priest proclaiming and preaching the gospel. Not a week goes by that the Lord doesn't speak a word to each of us but we have to listen if we want to hear what he has to say.

As if it were bread, we break open the Word of God to nourish us before we go to the altar to break the bread and bless the cup of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

At Communion time we process to the altar and as we come forward we prepare to receive by singing the Communion song. Our focus needs to be on the sacrament we're about to receive. This is not a time to nudge, greet and visit with others in line with us or with the folks in the aisle seats we pass by. Doing so disturbs and distracts those around us who are praying and takes our focus away from what we're about to do: receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

When it's time to receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharistic bread, the Communion minister shows us the sacrament and says "The Body of Christ" and we respond, "Amen." Then, if we've extended our hands, like this, the minister places the Eucharist on our upper palm and we use our other hand to bring it to our mouth. It's not appropriate to reach out to take the Eucharist from the minister.

If our hands are folded, the minister will know to place the Eucharist on our tongue, - after we've said, "Amen."

Having received the Body of Christ, we might choose also to drink from the cup of the Precious Blood. The minister presents the cup and says, "The Blood of Christ" and we respond, "Amen" and take the cup in our hands. It is never appropriate to dip the Host we've received in the chalice.

If we choose not to receive from the cup, then, as we pass the cup, we stop and bow as we pass by it, to reverence the Precious Blood.

Having received the Body and Blood of Christ under one or both kinds, we return to our seats to pray and sing in thanksgiving for the Lord's gift of himself in this Sacrament.

Let's take the occasion of this feast of Corpus Christi
to remember and renew our faith in what we believe:
that in the bread and cup of the Eucharist
we receive the Body and Blood of Christ.
Because this is what we believe, then certainly only sudden illness
would be a good reason to receive Communion
and then exit the church without returning to our seats
to complete the prayer of the Mass with the rest of the God's people.

It's bad manners to "eat and run" from anyone's table
and certainly it's very bad manners to do that at the Lord's table.
Let's all take care to give our children, especially,
only good example on this point.

These aren't just a bunch of rules for Mass.
These are reminders of how our presence, our posture and our prayer
are signs of our respect for where we are
and our reverence for what we do and what we receive
when we come to Mass.

At this table we celebrate the Supper Jesus gave his friends
on the night before he died.
At this altar we offer again and again
the sacrifice Jesus offered for us on the Cross.

What we celebrate and receive here
is at the heart of our lives as Catholic Christians.

What we do here is holy for in our prayer we share
in the holiest of all communions.

Let us approach
this sacred place,
the prayer we offer
and the sacrament we celebrate and receive
with respect and reverence for the Lord
and for his people with whom we gather to pray.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*