

Solemnity of
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Corpus Christi

Second Sunday after Pentecost or
Thursday after Trinity Sunday



The High Feast of the Lamb ((detail) Ghent altarpiece - Jan Van Eyck 16th c

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." -- *John 6:53, 54*

[The Holy Eucharist: Resources for Devotion - Adoration - Benediction - Doctrine - Study - Link to order Holy Eucharist Booklets](#) [the Adoremus Website] | [Corpus Christi Novena](#) [EWTN Website] | [MYSTICI CORPORIS CHRISTI](#), Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on the Mystical Body of Christ [Vatican Website] | [Homily of Pope Benedict XVI 2005](#) | [Homily of Pope Benedict XVI 2006](#)

Corpus Christi

The Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* commemorates the institution of the Holy Eucharist, paralleling Maundy Thursday (Holy Thursday) commemorating Our Lord's institution of the Eucharist. *Corpus Christi* was introduced in the late 13th century to encourage the faithful give

special honor to the institution of the Holy Eucharist to the Blessed Sacrament. The official title of this Solemnity was changed in 1970 to The Body and Blood of Christ (Latin: *Sollemnitas Sanctissimi Corporis et Sanguinis Christi*); and it is still on the Roman Missal's official Calendar for the universal Church on Thursday after Trinity Sunday; however, where it is not a day of obligation (as in the United States) it is usually celebrated on the Sunday following Trinity Sunday.

Corpus Christi became a mandatory feast in the Roman Church in 1312. But nearly a century earlier, Saint Juliana of Mont Cornillon, promoted a feast to honor the Blessed Sacrament. From early age Juliana, who became an Augustinian nun in Liège, France, in 1206, had a great veneration for the Blessed Sacrament, and longed for a special feast in its honor. She had a vision of the Church under the appearance of the full moon having one dark spot, which signified the absence of such a solemnity. She made known her ideas to the Bishop of Liège, Robert de Thorete, to the Dominican Hugh who later became cardinal legate in the Netherlands, and to Jacques Panaléon, at the time Archdeacon of Liège and who later became Pope Urban IV. Bishop Robert de Thorete ordered that the feast be celebrated in his diocese.

Pope Urban IV later published the Bull *Transiturus* (September 8, 1264), in which, after having extolled the love of Our Savior as expressed in the Holy Eucharist, ordered the annual celebration of *Corpus Christi* on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. More than four decades later, Pope Clement V published a new decree which embodied Urban IV's decree and ordered the adoption of the feast at the General Council of Vienna (1311). Pope John XXII, successor of Clement V, urged this observance.

The processions on *Corpus Christi* to honor the Holy Eucharist were not mentioned in the decrees, but had become a principal feature of the feast's celebration by the faithful, and became a tradition throughout Europe. These processions were endowed with indulgences by Popes Martin V and Eugene IV.

(Principal source - Catholic Encyclopedia - 1913 edition,)



Catechism of the Catholic Church - The Eucharist §§ 1322 - 1419

1324 The Eucharist is "source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

1325 "The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit."

1326 Finally, by the Eucharistic Celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all.

1327 In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking."

Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy Excerpt:

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

160. The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is observed on the Thursday 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).

(Link to complete [Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy](#) on Vatican web site)



Readings for Corpus Christi

Collect:

Lord Jesus Christ, You gave us the Eucharist
as the memorial of Your suffering and death.
May our worship of this sacrament of Your Body and Blood
help us to experience the salvation You won for us
and the peace of the kingdom
where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. +Amen.

or

Lord Jesus Christ,
we worship You living among us
in the Sacrament of Your Body and Blood.
May we offer to our Father in heaven
a solemn pledge of undivided love.
May we offer to our brothers and sisters
a life poured out in loving service of that kingdom
where You live with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. +Amen

Readings for Mass

Year A

First Reading: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a

Moses said to the people: "Remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments, or not. And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. Do not forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna which your fathers did not know."

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ? The Bread which we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Gospel Reading: John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the Jews, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever."

Year B

First Reading: Exodus 24:3-8

Second Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15

Gospel Reading: Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Year C

First Reading: Genesis 14:18-20

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth;

and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Gospel Reading: Luke 9:11-17

When the crowds learned it, they followed him; and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God, and cured those who had need of healing. Now the day began to wear away; and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the crowd away, to go into the villages and country round about, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a lonely place." But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish-- unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in companies, about fifty each." And they did so, and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were satisfied. And they took up what was left over, twelve baskets of broken pieces.



Family Activities:

- It would be great to revive the **Corpus Christi procession** -- in your parish, parish school or home-schooling group. Children love processions, and this would be an excellent way to demonstrate to them the meaning and the importance of this feast of the Church year. (In some places, this was a yearly feature of parish life until about forty years ago. Your parents or grandparents might describe these festive processions.)
- **Attend Eucharistic adoration** with children today, if possible. -- or at least make a prayer "visit" to the Blessed Sacrament in your own church. Explain why we fall on our knees in worship before the Blessed Sacrament of our Salvation -- that the word "Eucharist" means "thanks-giving" for the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. (Adults would do well to review the entire section on the Holy Eucharist in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. (See links page for a web version of the Catechism on the Vatican web site.)
- **Review religious vocabulary.** Today presents a good opportunity to review or explore the specifically religious meaning of the words "Sacrifice", "Salvation", "Righteousness", "Redemption", "Sacrament", "Consecrate", "Feast", "Blessed".
- If you did not have a chance to do the [Christian Seder Meal](#) for Holy Thursday you may want to consider this for today.

- [Pray for a priest](#). Talk to your children about vocations -- that is, about dedicating our lives to the service of Our Lord Jesus Christ as priests or in consecrated religious life.

- **Novena Honoring the Body and Blood of Christ --**

I thank You, Jesus, my Divine Redeemer, for coming upon the earth for our sake, and for instituting the adorable Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in order to remain with us until the end of the world.

I thank You for hiding beneath the Eucharistic species Your infinite majesty and beauty, which Your Angels delight to behold, so that I might have courage to approach the throne of Your Mercy.

I thank You, most loving Jesus, for having made Yourself my food, and for uniting me to Yourself with so much love in this wonderful Sacrament that I may live in You.

I thank You, my Jesus, for giving Yourself to me in this Blessed Sacrament, and so enriching it with the treasures of Your love that You have no greater gift to give me.

I thank You not only for becoming my food but also for offering Yourself as a continual sacrifice to Your Eternal Father for my salvation.

I thank You, Divine Priest, for offering Yourself as a Sacrifice daily upon our altars in adoration and homage to the Most Blessed Trinity, and for making amends for our poor and miserable adorations.

I thank You for renewing in this daily Sacrifice the actual Sacrifice of the Cross offered on Calvary, in which You satisfy Divine justice for us poor sinners.

I thank You, dear Jesus, for having become the priceless Victim to merit for me the fullness of heavenly favors. Awaken in me such confidence in You that their fullness may descend ever more fruitfully upon my soul.

I thank You for offering Yourself in thanksgiving to God for all His benefits, spiritual and temporal, which He has bestowed upon me.

In union with Your offering of Yourself to Your Father in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, I ask for this special favor: (Mention your request). If it be Your holy Will, grant my request. Through You I also hope to receive the grace of perseverance in Your love and faithful service, a holy death, and a happy eternity with You in Heaven. Amen.

O Lord, You have given us this Sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

You have given them bread from Heaven.

Having all sweetness within.

Let us pray. God our Father, for Your glory and our salvation You appointed Jesus Christ eternal High Priest. May the people He gained for You by His Blood come to share in the power of His Cross and Resurrection by celebrating His Memorial in this Eucharist, for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever. Amen.

O Jesus, since You have left us a remembrance of Your Passion beneath the veils of this Sacrament, grant us, we pray, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of Your Body and Blood that we may always enjoy the fruits of Your Redemption, for You live and reign forever. Amen.



Hymns

Saint Thomas Aquinas was given the task of composing hymns for the celebration of *Corpus Christi* by Pope Urban IV. These are among the best known (and beloved) of all Latin hymns, because they were traditionally sung by the people during regular **Eucharistic Devotions**, as well as by the choir on **Holy Thursday** and *Corpus Christi*. (Catholics over 50 can probably sing these by heart even yet.) The hymns are *Lauda Sion - Pange Lingua - Tantum Ergo*