



**This year was our first Corpus Christi at St Paul's, and I was surprised to see that, at the end of the Solemn Mass, Bishop Lee [the Bishop of Chicago who was making a canonical Visitation] led a procession with the monstrance [sacred vessel in which the Host is placed so that it can be seen] and then officiated at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.**

**Years ago we had Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in our former parish, but it was not continued after Father \_\_\_\_\_ left in the 1960's. It just doesn't seem compatible and consistent with a Rite II Eucharistic liturgy.**

Your observation is quite perceptive. The Mass celebrated using Rite II is based on the Eucharistic liturgy of the Early Church, or the "Patristic Age," essentially the first six centuries of the Christian era. Its paradigm or iconography is the re-presentation (*anamnesis*) of the Incarnation; that is, by means of the Sacrament of the Eucharist Christ actually comes again into the midst of His people *in this world*.

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is a devotion that developed (only) in the Western Church in the high Middle Ages, and hence it is a part of the Western medieval liturgical tradition, the iconography of which is the diametric opposite of Early Christian liturgy. In the liturgy of the medieval Western Church the paradigm is *leaving this world* and entering the glory of the presence of God in the heavenly throne room.

In each case all the liturgical elements (nature of the language, ceremony, vestments, music, etc.) intentionally create a distinct atmosphere and sense of relationship with God. On the occasion of Bishop Lee's Corpus Christi Visitation the Eucharistic liturgy was "in this world" and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was "in the awesome and glorious mystery of the presence of God in His heavenly kingdom." It is easy to understand how there might seem to be a "disconnect" when they are celebrated back-to-back.

It's a well-known fact at St Paul's that the Rector feels strongly that in order for any liturgy to communicate all that it has to give to us it must be celebrated with the integrity of its own historical form fully intact. As a parishioner here once put it, "Rite I-1/2" simply doesn't work. On the other hand, on Corpus Christi the Eucharistic liturgy was completed and then the Procession and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament began; they were not mixed together haphazardly. The Rector has also always felt that Rite I and Rite II liturgies are mutually complementary. Each re-presents an important dimension of our relationship with the Triune God, and we are spiritually impoverished if we do not have both in our Christian lives.

The most eminent contemporary Western theologian, Dr Joseph Ratzinger (better known today as Benedict XVI, Bishop of Rome), has said that the Liturgy of the Church must always be understood using a "hermeneutic [principle of interpretation] of continuity". Now more and more we are beginning to see a return to devotions that were dropped in the 1960's—as Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was in your former parish—just because they were medieval or Renaissance in origin. In the 1960's and 1970's almost everyone was stampeding to implement Early Christian practices, and most Western liturgical scholars then were saying that they alone were normative for the Church.

The Mass differs significantly from Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament—regardless of the Rite used—in that the Eucharist is the central liturgy of the Catholic Church, instituted and commanded by Jesus Christ Himself, required of all Christians, with prescribed forms which all members of the Church must observe. Furthermore it touches us on all levels of our being: intellectual, experiential, emotional.

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, on the other hand, is a devotion, not a liturgy. It was not commanded by Jesus Christ. No member has ever been required by any branch of the Catholic Church to participate in it. There are traditional forms, but there is no fixed, unalterable liturgy for it in any part of the Catholic Church. While there is a sound intellectual theological basis for this devotion, it is in practice a dimension of our spirituality that is purely relational and “from the heart.”

The Procession of the Blessed Sacrament which followed the Mass on Corpus Christi is just one of the liturgical processions which can be done in connection with the principal Eucharist on the great feasts and which are a part of the rich heritage of the Liturgical Year of the Western Church. The distinguished 20th Century English liturgist, the Rev. Percy Dearmer, reminds us that a liturgical procession is not to be confused with the Entrance of the Priest and liturgical ministers at the beginning of the Eucharist.

The procession is a distinct, significant act of worship: it is not an aimless walk round the church; but has a definite object.... There were anciently several distinct processions in connexion [*sic*] with the Eucharist in the English Church. The three principal were (1) the solemn procession before the service, not from the vestry but from the choir, round the church [with stops or “stations” and collects] to the Rood and Altar. (2) The procession to the lectern for the Gospel. (3) The offertory procession....

The Book of Common Prayer provides for a number of occasions for processions to take place; and it will be obvious that these ceremonies have a definite end in view.... It will thus be seen that a properly ordered procession is in the nature of a pilgrimage.... Whatever the occasion of a procession it should always have some end in view, since the object is to go somewhere to pray and worship.

The Church teaches that when the Sacrament of the Eucharist is validly celebrated ordinary bread and wine become the actual, real, living presence of Jesus Christ: body and blood, soul and divinity. The Procession of the Blessed Sacrament is a pilgrimage in which we follow our Lord and Savior, worship Him truly present in His Sacramental Body, and receive His blessing that we may be strengthened to be the Body of Christ here on earth today.

The Rev. Dr John Macquarrie, the leading Anglican theologian of the second half of the 20th Century, wrote:

The duty and privilege of the Christian is to play his part in offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice and in receiving Holy Communion.... But the aim must be to extend the action and meaning of the Eucharist out from the center to the furthest edges of life, so that the whole of life is conformed to the living Lord who gives Himself to us at the Altar.

...it would be a mistake if we were led to neglect or despise other acts of worship which have their proper place in the building up of the Christian life....there are many additional acts of devotion which help to extend it into all our activities and relationships and to increase our awareness of the sacramental character of creation. Such an act of devotion is Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament... “Let us for ever adore Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament.”