

*The following is the text of Father Fraser's homily on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi 2011.*

## The Body of Christ

Like me, many of you can well remember the time before the revolution of the 1960's. In the United States then we all lived in a segregated world: racially to be sure, but also culturally, socio-economically, and especially religiously.

And some of you, living in that segregated world, like me, grew up in the segment of American society that was overwhelming Protestant, so much so that, even if we ourselves were not Protestant, we naturally assumed that this was the way the majority of Christians were everywhere. Although we certainly came by that misperception honestly, it could not have been more wrong.

Even in the pre-1960's world, Protestantism was in fact a small percentage of all Christianity; and now, 50 years later, it is an even smaller percentage. Historically, of course, not only is Protestantism a late development (dating only from the 1500's and emerging only in a relatively small part of Europe) but throughout the past 500 years Protestants have always been a small minority of all Christians.

Protestantism, as you know, is essentially non-sacramental and for the most part non-liturgical. Catholicism, as Anglicanism understands it, is historic Christianity (that is, beginning at Pentecost, not at the 16th century Reformation) whose life is centered in Jesus Christ as He comes to His people in seven Sacraments validly celebrated (including, of course, the valid Ordination of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons in the Apostolic Succession). And these seven Sacraments are celebrated in the context of historic liturgy that goes back to Our Lord Himself. Anglicanism understands the Catholic Churches to be the Roman Catholic, the Eastern Orthodox, the Anglican, the Old Catholic, and the Oriental Churches.

To those of us who grew up in a pre-1960's Protestant-dominated culture, it may come as a surprise to realize that only a small part of Christianity, for a relatively short period of time, has not believed in the seven Sacraments and in the actual, Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Protestant non-sacramentalism is in fact the anomaly, not the norm.

Christianity as a whole is, and for 2,000 years has been, Catholic. It has always taught that when the Eucharist is celebrated by validly ordained Bishops and Priests, the bread and the wine become – that is, are changed into – the true, living Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Eucharist is a sacrifice that actually makes present again for us – just as they were for the Disciples – Our Lord's earthly ministry, passion, saving death, and resurrection. This the historic Christian Church has always taught and believed.

What, however, has differed through the two Christian millennia is not what Christians have believed about the nature and reality of the Eucharist, but what Christians have believed they should do with it. There have been those who believe that the Eucharist is principally a source of inspiration ... that is, something that inspires them, as it were, "to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps." There have been those – especially those who suffer with chronic guilt – who believe that the Eucharist is principally a sort of fire insurance for eternity.

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But Christianity is neither personal inspiration nor “celestial fire insurance.” The purpose and goal of the Christian Faith is Theosis, that is becoming more and more one in the being and the life of the Holy Trinity: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, finally in the fullness of the presence, the being, and the community of God in Heaven for eternity.

Martin Luther, the most traditional of the Protestant Reformers, taught a relatively high doctrine of the Eucharist. He said that Christ was really present ... that Christ was “in, through, around, and with” the bread and wine during the liturgy. However, Luther taught, the bread and wine remain bread and wine and Christ’s eucharistic presence ends at the conclusion of the liturgy. Luther meant well, but he didn’t get it right.

Christianity is about conversion, change ... the New Testament Greek word is *metanoia*. The Eucharist is not about having a temporary presence of Christ with bread and wine. The Eucharist is about change: fundamental, essential, real, substantial, permanent change. The bread and wine are permanently changed into the substance of the actual, living Body and Blood of Christ.

Christianity is about change: fundamental, essential, real, substantial, permanent change in my life and in yours. It is not about adding some ephemeral presence of Jesus around our lives as they are (after all, Jesus is already always present with everyone everywhere whether they are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, animist, or atheist!). The purpose and goal of Christianity is the change – *metanoia* – of our lives, individually and corporately into the Body of Christ here on earth so that we may have the fullness of Theosis in Heaven for eternity.

The principal means by which the Triune God gives us the grace for this fundamental, essential, real, substantial, permanent change in our lives is the seven Sacraments. And on this great feast of Corpus Christi we celebrate and give thanks to the Triune God both for the gift and vocation He has given us to become the Body of Christ and for the Eucharist, the true and living Body of Christ, by which we can become fully that which by our Baptism we have been made.