The Feast of Corpus Christi

On the second Sunday after Pentecost, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known as the Feast of Corpus Christi, which is Latin for “the body of Christ”.

This feast day commemorates the Eucharist, the meal in which we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharist is at the heart of our Catholic faith and traditionally, holds a special place among the sacraments.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has this to say about the importance of the Eucharist:

1324 The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." 134 "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." 135

The Eucharist was instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper and this institution of the sacrament is celebrated on Holy Thursday. However, the emphasis of the Triduum is on the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, which creates the need for another feast day focusing on the Eucharist itself.

As Catholics, we believe in transubstantiation, the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist.

1374 The mode of Christ’s presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend." 199 In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained." 200 "This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present." 201

The Feast of Corpus Christi emphasizes and celebrates this Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

The feast of Corpus Christi was first suggested by St. Juliana, a nun of Liege, Belgium, who personally had a strong devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and who longed for a feast in honour of the Eucharist. A papal bull was issued by Pope Urban IV in 1264
commanding the universal observance of the feast. Many of the prayers and hymns associated with the feast of Corpus Christi have been attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas, who composed them at the request of Pope Urban.

For us Catholics, every Mass is a commemoration of Jesus’ Last Supper and it is also a proclamation and a participation in this mystery. The feast of Corpus Christi helps us to refocus on what we are called to do at every Mass – to celebrate our belief in the risen Christ, to witness to our faith in that living Christ by how we live our lives and to become Christ by our receiving His Body and Blood.

In addition to the weekly celebration of the Mass on the feast of Corpus Christi, Eucharistic Adoration will take place in many parishes. In this Year of Faith, Pope Francis I has invited the cathedrals of the world to participate in a Worldwide Eucharistic Adoration on Sunday, June 2 from 5:00pm-6:00pm (Rome time). The theme of this Eucharistic Adoration is “One Lord, One Faith”.

In the announcement made on Tuesday, May 28 at the Holy See Press Office, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, said the following:

“It will be an event occurring for the first time in the history of the Church, which is why we can describe it as ‘historical’. The cathedrals of the world will be synchronized with Rome and will, for an hour, be in communion with the Pope in Eucharistic adoration. There has been an incredible response to this initiative, going beyond the cathedrals and involving episcopal conferences, parishes, lay associations, and religious congregations, especially cloistered ones.”

From the Cook Islands to Chile, Burkina Faso, Taiwan, Iraq, Bangladesh, the United States, and the Philippines, the dioceses will be synchronized with St. Peter’s and will pray for the intentions proposed by the Pope."

The Pope has proposed two intentions.

The first is: “For the Church spread throughout the world and united today in the adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist as a sign of unity. May the Lord make her ever more obedient to hearing his Word in order to stand before the world ‘ever more beautiful, without stain or blemish, but holy and blameless.’ That through her faithful announcement, the Word that saves may still resonate as the bearer of mercy and may increase love to give full meaning to pain and suffering, giving back joy and serenity.”

Pope Francis’ second intention is: “For those around the world who still suffer slavery and who are victims of war, human trafficking, drug running, and slave labour. For the children and women who are suffering from every type of violence. May their silent scream for help be heard by a vigilant Church so that, gazing upon the crucified Christ,
she may not forget the many brothers and sisters who are left at the mercy of violence. Also, for all those who find themselves in economically precarious situations, above all for the unemployed, the elderly, migrants, the homeless, prisoners, and those who experience marginalization. That the Church’s prayer and its active nearness give them comfort and assistance in hope and strength and courage in defending human dignity."

Many parishes in our diocese will participate in this Worldwide Eucharistic Adoration.