

June 19, 2014 – Feast of Corpus Christi
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Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16, Psalm 147:12-15, 19-20, First Corinthians 10:16-17, John 6:51-58

Today, on the feast of Corpus Christi, I want to share with you an example as to how very different a church service can be in another country. Living in Tanzania for over 50 years gave me a new experience as to the way people of other cultures attend religious services and find joy in church worship. I found it quite a different experience and an enriching one.

Corpus Christi, found on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday but often transferred to the following Sunday, is festive and meaningful as celebrated by the people of Tanzania.

Much planning goes into the celebration of the day. The feast centers on the procession. In the little town where I spent many years the procession includes a large area as several blocks. The police must be notified since traffic is disrupted as people process in the street. Small Christian Communities in the area are involved as they set up the festive altars for benediction along the way. The choirs plan and practice as they sing hymns continuously during the Eucharistic Procession. The women and young girls prepare and decorate the church. Young girls collect flowers and practice their detail of walking and dropping petals before the monstrance carrying the Blessed Sacrament. Altar boys walk and incense the Blessed Sacrament as it is carried by the priest under a canopy carried by leaders of the parish council. Each Small Christian Community has a title and walks behind the banner bearing its name. The church is filled and overflowing as all come to the mission to walk in the procession to witness to their love and faith in the Eucharist

As the Mass ends the people fall in line after the cross bearer, altar boys, choir, religious sisters and brothers and walk slowly throughout the town. Along the way three or four altars are festively prepared by the people. The priest stops at each one, prayers are recited, petitions are made and the priest gives the Eucharistic blessing. Slowly the procession returns to the church where the final blessing is given. The event can take up to four hours. The people are completely captivated – and this under the Tanzanian sun. It is truly an exciting and deeply spiritual experience.

This expression of solemn praise is most devout and sincere. The people are expressing their deep love for Jesus in the Eucharist. They are united with Jesus who at the Last Supper gathered his apostles and disciples and gave them his body to eat and his blood to drink. They believe what Jesus told them that whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them.

They are completely united with the Jesus who told them whoever feeds on me will have life and live forever. Their deep love and faith in the Eucharist is real and sincere. Adoration of the

Blessed Sacrament is a favorite devotion. They are eager to praise and glorify God and listen to God's word as he speaks to them.

WE BECOME WHAT WE EAT. This expression we often see connected with nutrition and diet as people are being asked to eat more healthily. In the Eucharist bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. When we receive the Eucharist we become Christ. He is in us and we are in him. It is a powerful thought and reality. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME. We become Christ and desire to give ourselves as Jesus gave himself in his life and as he continues to do so in the Eucharist. We are sent by God, we are fed by God and we have God's life in us. We are promised if we eat this bread we shall live forever. And as we receive the Eucharist and say our amen, we acknowledge this great truth.

Jesus has left us this meal with ordinary bread to nourish our bodies and wine to cheer our hearts. And with his signs and his words we are receiving his body and blood as our nourishment and joy. Daily we have this gift and on this feast of Corpus Christi the liturgy is planned to have a festive celebration in gratitude and thanksgiving for this gift of Jesus to be our strength and joy on our earthly journey. So we pray: Jesus increase our faith and our love for you and help us share this love for you with all we encounter.

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