

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi
May 29, 2016

+

You and I know Saint Paul did not set out to write letters to be included in the Bible! He gave us no systematic theology and no catechism as a textbook of Christian belief. Paul's epistles reveal the practical business of busy missionary work. He was always a man on the go. Chapter Eleven of 1st Corinthians is an example. It was written to correct some abusive practices of new Christian converts in Corinth, Greece. Corinth was a bustling and very pagan seaport. But what St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians is so basic to what we know and believe about the Blessed Sacrament that it could not but find its way into what came to be called "The New Testament."

Chapter Eleven contains Paul's description of the Last Supper. This probably predates the writing of any of the three Gospel accounts. That alone makes his account important. But St. Paul's account also contains *the actual words* Our Lord Jesus used at the Last Supper. You know those words! The Church carefully remembered them over the intervening twenty-year period before Paul wrote them down. The words of Christ are remembered because from the very beginning the Church used them in the Mass. All this means St Paul's account of the Last Supper is part of the very earliest Christian teaching. His epistles are part of the indispensable title deeds of the Church.

This is why we should know what Saint Paul meant when he told the Corinthians that in receiving the Blessed Sacrament they were proclaiming the Lord's *death*. It is not the dead body of Christ we receive. *There is no dead body of Christ*. Fifty days and perhaps no more than one mile from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, St Peter dared the Jewish Sanhedrin to produce the dead body of Christ. Jesus is the Living Lord. It is the *Risen Body of Christ* Which passes into us in Holy Communion. We receive the supernatural power of the Living Lord. It was always that way. On the very first Easter Day it was the Risen Lord hidden under a form they could not yet recognize which burned in the hearts of the two disciples on the Emmaus Road.

St Paul teaches we proclaim the Lord's death because the Mass is not only a consecration making possible the communion of the faithful. The Mass is a *sacrifice*. And a sacrifice involves the death of a victim and the application of the

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi
May 29, 2016

+

benefits of that death to others. In the Christian mystery we do not benefit from a dead Christ but *Christ dying for our sake* and pleading for our salvation to the Eternal Father. He cannot do that if He is a dead Christ. Dead men cannot do anything! But Christ is the Living Lord of Heaven.

Christ does not die again and again every time Mass is offered. *He died once*. But it is an eternal provision for our sake that His once-for-all death is made present for our benefit. Saint Paul understood the truth of this from the moment of his conversion. On the Damascus Road the Lord Jesus said, “Saul, Saul, who dost thou persecute Me?” The Risen and Ascended Lord in Heaven could not be affected by the cruelty Saul of Tarsus was inflicting on Christians. *Unless*. Unless the Lord Jesus was *still intimately connected* with believers in His Mystical Body. When the convert Paul began to hear the gospel good news he learned the Lord’s declaration “If you do it unto the least of these ye have done it unto Me.” *And the teaching all fit!* Christ Who once received a physical body from the Blessed Virgin Mary continues to undergo His life cycle in His Mystical Body the Church. That is why we know *when we suffer He suffers*. Christ’s dying and rising historically once-for-all are in God’s provision *made present* for our benefit.

The Body and Blood of Christ, given and shed for you and me, still come to us in a Willing Victim. That is why St Paul says we proclaim this dying in every Holy Communion. And as He comes to us, the Blessed Lord desires to see something of the victim in us. The secular world is full of victims these days. These are people who will not take responsibility for their own lives and actions. That is not what the Church teaches us to be! In *The Imitation of Christ* we are told it is the duty of every Christian soul to lead a dying life. This does not mean to deliberately get ourselves crucified by a 1st century Roman execution squad, or step out in front of a speeding bus on Centre Street! What it does mean is more *humility* in our lives when we are prevented from something we desire; more *resignation* when things go wrong; and being *less anxious* about material success. Not by coincidence are these things Christ-like characteristics.

The One we worship and adore is both Priest and Victim. He *offers* the sacrifice and He *is* the Sacrifice We are glad! Eucharist means **to give thanks**. And by

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi
May 29, 2016

+

feeding upon Him, taking His life into ours and being taken up into His, we
proclaim the death of the Lord Who lives, until He comes in glory.