

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Corpus Christi
May 31, 2018

+

At the end of the Gospel accounts the Lord Jesus assured His followers He would not leave them. *And then He did!* The Lord ascended into Heaven. So in just what way, we must ask (and those standing outside the Catholic religion certainly *do* ask) does Christ fulfill His promise: “I am with you always?”

The answer is found on the night before Jesus died on the Cross. It was then He showed the apostles how His promise was to be fulfilled. He gave them bread and wine accompanied by His solemn declaration of words that these were His Body and Blood. And the Lord gave the command that His followers should repeat His words and action.

Many want-to-be Christians (and people who actually *call* themselves Christians) find a great stumbling block in the Church’s teaching about the Blessed Sacrament. They accept God becoming a baby and born of a virgin; allowing Himself to be crucified and then rising from the dead; founding a Divine Society to continue His work on earth. But many people cannot accept that Almighty God still dwells with us specifically in the Blessed Sacrament; that He gives Himself to us under the outward appearance and material form of bread and wine. And as a result of this stumbling block, there are sincere and clever attempts to water down Catholic teaching. People appeal to other parts of the Gospel story which allude to a vague application of bread and wine. They appeal to a meal as the ongoing sign that Christ used such things for *fellowship* with us. The miracle at the Cana wedding feast is usually cited to support this notion, as is the miraculous Feeding of 5000 on the Galilean hillside. But in Cana there was a *trans-materialism*: the material of water stopped being water and became the physical material of wine. That is not what happens in the Blessed Sacrament. And in the Feeding of the 5000 there was a *multiplication of loaves*. That also does not describe the Eucharist.

We can get closer than that to understanding what Christ did at the Last Supper. Consider Jesus standing next to the dead body of Jairus’ daughter. Or the centurion’s request to the Lord to help his servant. When Jesus said those two Aramaic words, *talitha, cumi*, “Little girl I say to thee, arise,” *she did*. Life entered a lifeless form at the words of One Who once long ago commanded “Let there be

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Corpus Christi
May 31, 2018
+

light: and there was light.” Here we are getting close to what Holy Church believes about the Body and Blood of Christ. In a wonderful way a centurion, who was not even a follower of Jesus, would understand this before just about anyone else. In asking for help for his servant, the centurion said, “Lord, *only say the word.*”

Before His Ascension Christ said “Lo, I am with you always.” It was not the assurance of some vague, remote, and future, memory of His Presence, as if the Son of God was giving a lukewarm promise He would think about us from Heaven and send a card now and then. By saying “Lo, I am with you always, the Lord was talking about the Blessed Sacrament.”

The Eucharist is the extension and completion of the Lord’s Incarnation. Blessed Jesus did not have a second thought about becoming a baby and shivering in a cradle in an open stable in Bethlehem. The same God of glory now comes to us in the lowly form of bread and wine, in order to apply and repeat the same benefits of His Incarnation to each one of us. “Christ in the Sacraments is not altogether unlike Christ in the crib” said Bishop Andrewes. So you and I are invited to come to the Lord in His Sacramental Presence. Bring your needs, offer your praises, sympathize with His sufferings, unite yours to His, confess your sins, assure Him of your love. You can do all those things the disciples could do in the 1st Century Galilean hills.

At the Incarnation, not everyone knew the Lord. The earthly concealed the heavenly. The same is true of the Sacrament of the Altar. One form of the Lord’s Presence is not more marvelous than the other. And Corpus Christi bids us constantly keep in mind this *close and abiding connection* between the two comings of Christ: historically and sacramentally. This is the great celebration of the mystery in which as He promised, Christ Jesus is truly with us always.