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CORPUS CHRISTI

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, May 30th, 2024)

Fac cor nostrum secundum Cor tuum.

Make our hearts like Thine.

(Verse from the Litanies of the Sacred Heart)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

THE MYSTERY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY, which we celebrated last Sunday, rounded off the liturgical cycle dedicated to the Christian mysteries. Two feasts, however, come and complete this cycle: Corpus Christi, and the feast of the Sacred Heart. The former dates back to the 13th century. The latter is in line with the development of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus during the Middle Ages, and in the wake of the apparitions of Paray-le-Monial between 1673 and 1675. The feast of the Sacred Heart was extended to the universal Church by Pius IX in 1856.

The great jubilee of the 350th anniversary of the apparitions to St. Marguerite-Marie began on December 27th last, the anniversary of the first main apparition, and will end on June 27th, 2025, on the solemnity of the Sacred Heart. This jubilee invites us to establish a connection between these two feasts.

At first sight, everything seems to divide them. The very name of Corpus Christi in French, “*Fête-Dieu*, God’s Feast,” evokes the God of heaven and earth, the Almighty, the Lord

of hosts, so faraway and remote from men. On the contrary, a heart, even the Sacred Heart, bears the imprint of vulnerability. Although by its beats it gives pace to life, we know only too well that the last of these beats will toll the hour of our death. To affect a heart, to wound it, means to affect life itself, to wound it, and even to destroy it. If we now take “heart” in a figurative sense, fraternal life, family life, society, teach us how this heart can sometimes close itself and exclude one’s neighbours, or on the contrary yearn to devour them. What do the Eternal, the Impassive, the Invulnerable on the one hand, and on the other hand the so weak human heart, have in common?

The text of today’s gospel is taken from Jesus’ teaching in the Capernaum synagogue:

For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. [...] He who eats this bread will live for ever.^a

a. *Jn* 6:55-56.58.

The Jews had already grumbled when the Lord had affirmed: “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”^b These words seemed scandalous. Now, enough was enough. Many among the disciples went back and ceased going with Him.

b. *Jn* 6:35.

Nowadays, it would mostly be indifference that blocks out the gift of love the Lord wants to give us in His body and blood. That is evidenced by depopulation of churches, and the scrapping of Christian culture, deemed old-fashioned. As to us, are we able, as St. Paul recommended in today’s epistle, to discern the body of the Lord when we go to communion?

But how could we discern this body in such a tiny quantity of bread? Let us go near the Cross, where the Lord, after crying with a loud voice, has just yielded up his spirit.

When a man dies, a pall of silence shrouds his corpse. Here, nothing of the sort. As evidenced by St. Matthew:

And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him,

keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"^a

a. *Mt* 27:51-54.

Faced with Jesus' lifeless body, the centurion and the watchmen discern the presence of the Son of God.

St. John evokes the soldier who shortly afterwards pierces the Lord's side with a spear thrust and reaches His heart: "And at once there came out blood and water."^b And he adds: "He who saw it has borne witness; and his testimony is true — and He knows that he tells the truth, — that you also may believe."^c

b. *Jn* 19:34.

c. v. 35.

Indeed, what is at stake here is to believe: to discern in the wound of this opened heart the inexhaustible flow of sacramental grace, which comes and is poured out on every man of good will, and with which we are so often given food and drink in the Eucharist.

When a heart stops beating, it heralds the death of a man, it bears witness to this man's end. Not so for the Son of God. If God is God, in a manner of speaking, if He wanted to take flesh, then He could but give His heart to be pierced. Jesus' death on a cross isn't the end of a life. It is the recreation of life, of all life, a rebirth offered to every man towards everlasting life.

Receiving holy communion means going to the inexhaustible fount that will transform our being. "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like Thine."

Such is the the fruit of the Eucharist. Communion after communion, our hearts resemble more and more Christ's heart. They live of His life, and learn to love as Jesus Himself loves, namely by giving His life for His friends.

As the Blessed Sacrament will be adored between Mass and Vespers, which will also be the case next Sunday and on the feast of the Sacred Heart, as well as every Sunday between None and Vespers, let us ask the Lord to pursue and complete this deep transformation of our beings, of our hearts. May He give us that heart which can no longer die, that heart which doesn't exhaust itself even when it practises a limitless charity, merely because it draws this charity from the very heart of Jesus. May He give us a heart that takes as a motto these verses

taken from the hymn to charity:

Charity is patient and kind; charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.^a

a. 1 Cor 13:4-7.

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”^b

b. Jn 6:56.

Amen, Alleluia.

