

Anniversaries of Corpus Christi Parish and Ordination of Fr. Martin Demek

Introduction

Sometimes things just come together in a wonderful way. This is one of those Sundays. It is the patronal feast of your parish, the 135th anniversary of its founding, the 40th anniversary of the priestly ordination of your pastor, and into the mix is added my first though not last pastoral visit. Who could ask for anything more?

But let's begin with you pastor, Father Demek. As you know, he grew up not far from here, in South Baltimore, studied for the priesthood in Catonsville and Rome, and was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop William D. Borders. Since then he has served in various parishes of the Archdiocese, including St. Bartholomew's in Manchester, St. William of York here in Baltimore, and for the past five years as Pastor of Corpus Christi. Father Marty did not ask that I canonize him, at least not yet, but I do want to join with you in offer him our support and warmest thanks as he marks four decades of priestly service to God's People - Marty, congratulations!

Now let's take moment to remember and give thanks for those who gave us this beautiful Church, founded 135 years ago. We especially remember the Jenkins family whose generosity lives on in this extraordinarily beautiful Gothic church, adored as it is with truly luminous mosaics and glittering stained glass, with the themes of wheat and grape woven throughout the fabric of the building. As you know, the architect was the celebrated Patrick Keely who designed and built beautiful churches and cathedrals in many places; I have a special fondness for him

as he designed the Cathedral of St. Augustine in the Diocese of Bridgeport, CT, where I previously served for eleven years. Much as I love my old cathedral, I'd have to say Keely outdid himself on Bolton Hill! And Cardinal Gibbons, who spent 14 hours dedicating this church, outdid himself when, with the agreement of the parish, he named it "Corpus Christi" - the first church in the United State to be so designated. Friends, we're living with history! (By the way, this Mass will not last 14 hours).

Not Just History: Past, Present, and Future

But wait a minute! We're not just living with history. History is living with us. So is the future. And both illuminate the present. In this vein Pope Francis refers to the Eucharist as "Viaticum", food for the journey, as we make our way through history's headwinds toward the Kingdom of God, and along the way, extend God's Kingdom to our neighbors, co-workers, and friends. The Eucharist is how the Lord accompanies his Church, and us who are its members, from the first moment of its existence until the consummation of history. So let us reflect on the past & anticipate the future thus to understand the present.

St. Mark's Gospel describes what the Lord did for us on the night before he died. Intrigue was in the air in that hour when Jesus would lay down his life for us. The Lord didn't try to flee or just let it happen to him - Mark's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus himself made the arrangements for this Passover Supper during which he would anticipate and interpret his impending death. In a word, he freely entered into the events that brought about our salvation.

While at table, Jesus did what is so familiar to us: He took break, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to disciples. In the one loaf that was broken, the disciples understood their oneness with the Lord, with their heritage, and with one another... but Jesus went further, when he said of the bread, "This is my body." 'Jesus identifies the broken bread with his own body about to be broken on the Cross.' Jesus gave them

not merely a sign of fellowship but the very gift of himself whom they received in the very depth of their being. So too with the cup, itself a sign of fellowship with the Lord and one another but now Jesus identified the wine with his blood, the very seat of his life, which would be poured out for the multitudes for the forgiveness of sins. By drinking his blood we are cleansed of our sin, we share in his passion, and we are elevated to share his own life; we become, in effect, the Lord's "blood relatives".

At the Last Supper Jesus not only anticipated the Cross, he also anticipated the Resurrection and his exaltation when he spoke of drinking the fruit of the vine "new" in the Kingdom of God. The wine that becomes the blood of Jesus' passion is our life-blood, not just in this world but "forever and a day", when we enter into heaven, that is, the blessedness of the Christ of the Beatitudes. It is toward this absolute future that we journey in hope in a world still in the grip of sin and death. Thus the past, thus the future, what about the present?

"In the Meantime"

In Mark's account of the Last Supper, strangely enough, the Lord's words recounted elsewhere are omitted: "Do this in memory of me" - words the Church understands as that moment when Christ ordained the Apostles and instituted the priesthood. But not to worry, Father Marty, St. Mark has not done us in. Indeed, by the time Mark wrote his Gospel, the Eucharist was already the center of the Church's life. Mark's first audience was already fulfilling Jesus' command, "Do this in memory of me." For them, the Eucharist not only kept alive Jesus' gift of self but also anticipated his return in glory, and in the meantime gave them strength to live as the Lord's disciples and witnesses.

Like the earliest Christians, we too are grateful to share in as a present reality what Jesus did to save us even as "we look forward with joyful hope to the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." Yet, as Pope Benedict XVI wrote: those who have hope live differently. Just how differently Pp. Francis highlighted last Thursday in his Corpus

Christi homily: He tells us that Christ's communion with us in the Eucharist and our communion with one another in the Body of Christ challenges us to "communion with the poor, support for the weak, fraternal attention to those who are struggling to carry the weight of everyday life and are in danger of losing their faith." But that's not all-for the Pope tells us that when we are sustained by the Eucharist we are able to live in this passing world unaffected by the idolatries of our time: "appearance, consumption, the self at the center of everything, being competitive, arrogance as the winning attitude, the idea that one never need admit to a mistake or find oneself in need." All this is contrary to the blessedness of the Christ of the Beatitude through whom, in whom, and with whom we find our heaven, our blessedness.

In your parish mission statement you express a deep understanding of the implications of the Eucharist as the center of the life of Corpus Christi Parish: its implications for your relationship with the wider Church; its implications for the support and love you owe one another; its mandate to be not only a welcoming community but a missionary community; its mandate to serve the poor and the needy as Christ himself. On this day of joy and grace, as we give thanks for 135 years and 40 years, as we celebrate the gift of Christ's Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity let us give God thanks and praise and may that praise resound not only in the walls of this beautiful church but also in the Church at large, the streets of Baltimore, and the very vaults of heaven! May God bless us and keep us always in His love!