

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Corpus Christi 2017

Corpus Christi

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

June 18, 2017

It has been said that life is a journey, not a destination. And isn't it true that the longer we journey through life, the clearer it becomes that our final destination is not in this world. Experience also teaches that it's difficult, if not impossible, to make this journey alone.

All this was brought home to me some forty years ago, as a newly ordained priest. Back then, I considered myself a very busy person. After all, I had a parish to serve and a doctorate in theology to earn. I had to manage my time well and wisely so as to fit everything in. Among my stops one fine day was Prince George's County Hospital where I visited a parishioner who was entering into the last hours of her life. Sad to say, I had "budgeted" only a certain amount of time for the visit.

After ministering to her, I asked if there were anything else I could do for her. She smiled at this newly minted priest and said, "Yes, Father, there is. I don't have long to live and I'm alone in this world. Would you just sit with me?" There was only one right answer. "Of course, I will" and I stayed with her until she journeyed from this life into the next. Next morning when I went into church to pray, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament seemed to be waiting for me. As soon as I sat down, I could almost hear the Eucharistic Lord saying to me, "I remain with you. Shouldn't you be willing to remain with people who need you?" Suddenly I remembered the many good priests who taught me about the link between Jesus' presence in the Eucharist and our presence to one another.

Yes, life is a journey and the journey isn't always pleasant. In the reading from the Book of Deuteronomy we read how the Israelites journeyed from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. That journey involved hunger, indeed, near starvation in the desert, where God's people encountered serpents and

scorpions, not to mention hostile tribes who attacked them. And while we're at it, let's not forget that this difficult journey last a long time. Scripture pegs it at forty years . . . just imagine wandering in the desert for forty years. How, then, can we relate to this defining experience of the Israelites? We are not nomads in a desert; most of us lead lives of stability and prosperity, though, only blocks from here, many live in abject poverty and instability. Yet, isn't it true that, for all of us, the journey of life is challenging. Yes, we do live in a land where there is plenty of water, vegetation, and food yet often find ourselves spiritually parched and inwardly hungry. In our daily comings and goings, we may not encounter snakes or scorpions but there's no doubt we live in a world filled with dangers to our mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. And how easy it would be to amass more than enough of this world's goods yet be hollowed out inside because we attempted to live, as Scripture says, "by bread alone" and not "by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."

Let us pay attention to what happened to the Israelites in the desert. Moses reassured his people that the Lord was indeed walking with them – and the visible sign of God's presence was water that came forth from the rock and manna that came down from the heavens. The Lord accompanied the Israelites to the Promised Land, every step of the way, and, along the way, he slaked their thirst and satisfied their hunger.

And the Lord didn't stop walking with humanity once the Israelites arrived in Canaan. Far from abandoning the human family on its journey through history, the Lord has drawn even nearer to us than to his people in the desert. Every Sunday we proclaim this! We say that God sent his Son into the world – conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Thus did the Word become flesh and dwell among us" – *the visible sign of the God we cannot see.*

In the Gospel of John, we meet Jesus, the Incarnate Word, on *his* journey through life. In the midst of his public ministry he was challenged to work a miracle greater than the manna that God had sent the Israelites in the desert. Jesus, who is "God-with-us", responded by proclaiming that he is the Bread of Life. Jesus is food for the journey that leads not merely from one place to another but rather that journey which leads from sin to grace and from grace to glory. Jesus is the food that enables

you and me to journey from death to everlasting life. The true bread from heaven that gives eternal life is the crucified and glorified flesh and blood of Jesus himself.

In the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood, Jesus gives us his own flesh to eat and his blood to drink. *This* is how Jesus remains present to us; *this* is how he walks with us, and along the way, he satisfies our hunger and thirst with his own Body and Blood in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. . .he who is "the way, the truth, and the life!"

Paul reinforces this very point in today's reading from 1st Corinthians. Writing more than twenty years after the death of Christ, Paul strongly urges the Corinthians to avoid taking part in sacrificial meals, common at the time in the Roman Empire and meant to honor false gods. Rather, he urges them to flee idolatry in all its forms and instead take part in the sacrificial meal that is the Eucharist: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" And because of our communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, Paul teaches, we have communion, we have fellowship, with one another . . .for, as Paul says, "we all partake of the one loaf" . . . one bread, one body!

This beautiful feast of Corpus Christi has been celebrated for centuries to strengthen our faith in the mystery of the Eucharist, by which the Risen Lord remains with us and accompanies us on our journey, all the while enabling us to be present to one another along the way. Today (weather permitting) we will express our faith in the Lord who walks with us in all the ups and downs of our lives - by walking with the Lord in a Eucharistic procession around this great cathedral church. As together we walk in procession and adore the Lord Jesus, we affirm our faith in him who is "the way and the truth and the life!" We acknowledge that it is he who frees us from our spiritual paralysis and lethargy, it is he who is at our side amid our hopes and dreams, our fears and anxieties. Indeed, without the living presence of the Lord in our midst and in our hearts, how can we stand up to this pilgrimage through life?

And as we walk together in procession, united in faith and adoration, the Eucharistic

Lord helps us overcome our divisions, our grudges, our polarization – all those things that drive us apart as believers and as a society. Along the way, the Eucharistic Lord will also remove from us, if we are willing, all the false gods, all the idolatry that Western culture so temptingly offers to us. As we bend the knee – genuflecting and kneeling in adoration of the Eucharistic Lord, we acknowledge that Jesus has freed us from these false idols. What joy and freedom we do indeed discover as we bow humbly before him who stooped to wash our feet and to bind up our wounds. Praying before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and driving out the sound and fury of the world for a few precious moments, our souls are nourished with love, truth, and peace – and our eyes are opened to the neighbor who journeys side-by-side with us. In this way, the Lord remains with us and we remain with the Lord, so as to be present to one another, especially our neighbor in need.

*Jesu, of your love befriend us,
You refresh us, you defend us,
Your eternal goodness send us
in the land of life to see!"*

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!