CORPUS CHRISTI 2014
SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
HYMNS 199 AND 204, JOHN 6.55
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SING…EXPLAIN THAT WHICH IS A GREAT MYSTERY…ABOUT THE (GLORIOUS) BODY OF OUR LORD (JESUS)…THE OPENING CALL OF THE HYMN PANGE LINGUA WE HAVE JUST SUNG. ST THOMAS AQUINAS WROTE THE HYMN IN THE 13TH CENTURY TO SUMMARIZE WHAT WE KNOW AND BELIEVE, BY FAITH, ABOUT THE BODY OF JESUS. HE WROTE THE HYMN DEFINING THIS DAY, CORPUS CHRISTI…(L) THE BODY OF CHRIST.

My early church career was marked by two emblems of this day…frequently singing PANGE LINGUA and, as an, acolyte at St Alban's Parish, absorbing the prayer said in the sacristy by the priest after every Mass. I could recite it from memory, while never knowing, since it does not appear in the BCP, its origin. Drilled into during that same period were the essential precepts of Catholic Christianity …the imperative of both WORD AND SACRAMENTS. Catholic, universal, complete Christianity demands both…they are inseparably linked…the Church is incomplete without both.

Thomas Aquinas underpins that perspective in the last verse of the hymn…while we cannot objectively see Jesus by staring at the Sacrament, our faith, our reason and our experience show us he is present…the GREAT MYSTERY understood.

About the prayer…after years of saying the prayer to myself, I discovered the origin…it is the Collect for today, CORPUS CHRISTI!

O Lord, who in this sacrament of the altar has left us a memorial of your suffering, give us the ability to understand and hold true these sacred mysteries of the Body and Blood of Jesus; that we may understand within ourselves how you have provided for us to be redeemed.

The reason for this special day concentrating on the Body of Christ is so that we pay special importance to the Sacrament that sustains us…we are called to think about it in personal terms. This week we are called to think about the Body of Christ and what is really present for **US** in the Sacrament of Holy Communion we will receive in a little while.

Consider today's Gospel in context…

The narrative details what occurred after Jesus fed 5000 people…it's his dialogue with a group of angry people at the synagogue in Capernaum. They stubbornly scoffed at what he taught…that he was sent from God the Father to make things simpler to understand…they could live forever…not experience the perceived hopeless dead end of their ancestors. He told them yes, your relatives ate manna from heaven as they wandered through the wilderness but still they eventually died. Now things are different…this will keep you [and us] going forever. They were unpersuaded…persisting in their rejection of the very thing just experienced.

What does the "BODY" of Christ mean…what are we actually receiving…why is it important? The Greek word SARX (ΣΑΡΞ) encompasses what Jesus taught…the word means more than "body" in the physical sense…it is all inclusive, everything, total, body and soul. Considerable clarity emerges…CORPUS CHRISTI…the Body of Christ teaches us that Jesus gave his total existence, virtually everything; so unlike what happened in the past, life can continue.

A special day for the Body of Christ makes sense when we understand both CONCEPT AND CONTEXT…just as Jesus left the apostles at the Ascension and gave instructions of "what to do now", he has also left us to put into practice what he taught at the Last Supper...sustained by a complete giving of himself in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. That's what Jesus explained to the group in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Today sounds much like a re-visitation of Maundy Thursday…indeed with good reason…Corpus Christi is the exposition that which Jesus founded, first addressed in St Paul's Epistle…further illuminated by Thomas Aquinas some 1200 years later…

The hymns of St Thomas Aquinas teach us about CORPUS CHRISTI…the bread of life. Today concentrates our thoughts on the unreserved, loving act (Agape) of God, having become as one of us…then giving himself TO and FOR us…proceeding forth…FOREVER.
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