

**CORPUS CHRISTI 2015**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER JOHN ALTBERG**  
**HYMNS 199 AND 204, JOHN 6.55**



**NOW I EXPLAIN THAT WHICH IS A GREAT MYSTERY...THE SACRAMENT OF THE BODY OF JESUS...THE OPENING EXPLANATION OF THE GREAT HYMN *PANGE LINGUA*. ST THOMAS AQUINAS WROTE THIS HYMN IN THE 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO SUMMARIZE THAT WHICH WE KNOW AND BELIEVE BY FAITH ABOUT THE BODY OF JESUS. HE WROTE THE HYMN FOR THIS DAY, CORPUS CHRISTI...(L) THE BODY OF CHRIST...**

My early church career was marked by two emblems of this day...frequent singing of that hymn and as an acolyte at St Alban's Parish, learning the prayer said by the priest at the end of every Mass. I could recite it from memory, though not knowing, since it does not appear in the BCP, its origin. Drilled into me at that same time was one of the essential precepts of Catholic Christianity...the imperative of both **WORD** AND **SACRAMENTS** of the Church. Catholic, universal, complete Christianity demands both - they are inseparably linked – for the Church is otherwise, incomplete.

St Thomas Aquinas underscores that very perspective in the last verse of the hymn ...while we cannot objectively see Jesus by staring at the Sacrament, our faith, reason and experience show us that he is present...the GREAT MYSTERY understood...or at least accepted...accepted in the same manner as Father Looney outlined in last Sunday's superb sermon on The Holy Trinity

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...today calls us to think about it in a personal way...not an abstraction. This week I ask us to personally consider the Body

of Christ...what is present in the Sacrament of Holy Communion we receive.

Consider, in context, today's Gospel...

This narrative details the confrontation following Jesus feeding 5000 people...a hot dialogue with a group of angry Jews at the synagogue in Capernaum. They stubbornly scoffed at what he taught...that he was sent from the Father to make things simpler to understand...they could live forever...not perish in the dead end of their ancestors. Jesus said, true, your relatives ate manna from heaven as they wandered through the wilderness...yet still died. Now things are different...this will keep you [and us] going forever. They were unpersuaded...persisting in rejection of the very thing they 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 for us. He did this 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 on Maundy Thursday...sustained by a complete and unreserved giving of himself in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. That's what Jesus explained to the group in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Our children grew up hearing the hymns of St Thomas Aquinas sung constantly in our home. The hymns of Thomas Aquinas teach us today, just as they have for 900 years. About CORPUS CHRISTI...the bread of life -This day concentrates our thoughts on the unreserved, love story (Agape) of God, having become as one of us...then, in a mystifying reversal, GIVING **HIMSELF** TO AND FOR US...**FOREVER**.

