

Sermon on Corpus Christi 6/11/2020
By Sister Laura Katharine, CSJB

If you were hoping for a theological sermon, that's not going to happen, but let's say it's a history lesson instead, because; in some ways Corpus Christi, I think, is just as problematic and challenging to explain as the Trinity. Words of defining, though needed, are sometimes a limiting vessel. Both of these feasts must have the essential elements of faith and belief (yet, how do we really define these words either?) but at least they exist. This in the end, I think, is a heart/gut knowing response which comes to each believer.

So to the History Lesson: Corpus Christi is one of those singular and significant feasts for which the Church of England and subsequently those in the now Anglican Communion have inherited from the Roman Catholic liturgy. At present, as there has been a general renewal of liturgical practices across the board, so there are now very few Anglican/Episcopal churches and Religious communities which still keep this feast.

I haven't been able to discover, as to 'the why' as to the when this has been set. It has been designated to be observed and celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. So, the feast can happen as early as the 25th of May and can take place as late as St. John Baptist day, thus, for it all is dependent upon the date when Easter occurs.

When and where did this feast begin? For the Roman Church, this feast was a late addition. Its history begins back to sometime in the early 1500's. A Roman Catholic, Juliana, was the prioress of the Abbey of Mont. Corinillion, which was near the city of Liège, in Belgium. She had a special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament since she was a very young child. Thus, at some point, she was given a vision regarding the Body of Christ. She did not have any luck in convincing the near-by clergy of this Vision. (my guess is; because of the given day and age; and the fact she was a woman.) (I wonder what would have happened if it were a monk instead??) It was some time later she was able to tell the Bishop Robert de Torote, of Liège her vision, and it was he, who actually believed her. In 1546, he even began a celebration in his Diocese, of what was to become in time a feast of the Church. It was not until after her death in 1553, it so happened, that Bishop Torote was elected to be Pope in Rome taking the name of Urban IV.

It was then, he appointed none other than Thomas Aquinas, to create a liturgy for the feast, solely for the celebration of the Eucharist in and of itself. As the Pope happened to die before this

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was accomplished, it took until 1564 before it was even established as a feast. It was not until 1573 that the feast was actually placed on the Roman calendar. So much for this piece of history.

For us in particular, there are subsequent pieces, but can be seen as an appendage. Gant, much of what we do & celebrate here in CSJB comes directly from what we inherited from CSJB in England. Somewhere in the dim recesses of my memory, I knew that Canon Carter had a connection to the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament organization. So, I e-mailed Valerie for some info. Here is what she wrote back.

Canon Carter was a founding member of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament in 1862. He at the time, was still plain Rev. T.T. Carter as he was not made a Canon until 1870. Carter, chaired a meeting of clergy in the Common Room of the clergy house at All Saint's, Margaret street in London. This was done 'with a view to establishing a settled doctrine and a basis of teaching, so as to maintain the principles according to what was believed to be the Church of England's truth'.

The founding of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament was the direct result of this meeting. Principally, in order to maintain the belief in the Real Presence in the Eucharist, at a time when this belief was under real threat. It was then, Carter was elected to be Superior General of CBS. He held that post for 35 yrs. (This was one of the many outcomes of the Oxford Movement.)

Valerie also added this quote she had from his sister's memoir; 'He was always moderate in his teaching, he did not press for fasting Communion, but also he did not attempt to explain the real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but believed that it was Our Lord's very self, changing the earthly to the heavenly, the natural to the spiritual, 'til the new creation was perfected in Christ's likeness. He comes, the very God, at the voice of man, beseeching, pleading the promise, but through the power of the Holy Ghost." She included another quote: I which I thought remarkable and significant. A former curate, Dean Lubbock, said that Carter, "believed and lived as no one else I have ever known, in the belief of the transforming power of Sacramental Grace."

As a result of CBS & no doubt Canon Carter, the Sisters then, when they were life Professed became Associates. This too was something handed down to us, as the CBS was well established in the U.S. certainly by the 1870's. The Sisters arriving in '74. I think Sr. ML was the last to have received a medal, but it is why we still get the intercession pamphlet. (Personally, I no longer

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wear mine, primarily, because it happens to have been one that was blessed by Canon Carter, and eventually will be put in archive.)

For those of you who may not know; the CBS on its US website states: it is a devotional society of the Anglian communion dedicated to the veneration of the real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but also – to promote the Eucharist as the main service in churches, having regular confession – and Eucharistic fast. It also happens to mention its beginnings in England giving the date and mentioning and having a picture of T. T. Carter. It also added that the structure of Benediction (which is what Veneration is) has not changed since the English form was set in 1865, just 3 yrs. after that foundation began.

Aside from this, again we have another very direct connection. The Eucharist itself has been since the begin-ning, one of the primary spiritual practice of our Com-munity's life. Our Rule states there shall be a daily Eucharist. (what was deleted later; that if not; the Sisters were to go to church.) Last piece: until the mid-90's, when Fr. Shearer had retired & Doug Freer had gone to Rome, we had Benediction, followed Vespers; every Sun-day, on Class I & II and Holy Hour every evening except the 1st. during our Long Retreat. The last piece, we also were in chapel after Vespers on other days, for preparing our self for the Eucharist the next morning, and though we no longer stay in chapel, we are still obligated to do so.

In closing, I thought it might be appropriate to choose a communion hymn verse: 323 : Bread of Heaven on Thee we feed, for Thu Flesh is meat indeed; ever may our souls be fed, with this true and living Bread. Amen.