

On the feast of Corpus Christi we have our annual procession beyond the church property into the neighborhood. This year the procession is/was after the 11:00 mass. It's only around the block, but it symbolizes something much greater. In both our first reading and the Gospel we hear mention of manna, the mysterious bread come down from heaven that supplied the Hebrew people on their journey out of Egypt to the Promised Land. And Jesus refers to this when He stuns His listeners by promising, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him . . . This is the bread that came down from heaven . . . whoever eats this bread will live forever." Those scriptural passages give us a clue as to what this feast day is all about.

The Corpus Christi procession defines our identity as Catholics. We are the People of God on the great journey. Pope Benedict XVI before he was Pope, as Joseph Ratzinger, wrote about the Corpus Christi day procession thus, "Corpus Christi expounds the meaning of our whole life, of the whole history of the world: marching toward the

promised land, a march that can keep on the right direction only if we are walking with him who came among us as bread and Word.”

The Corpus Christi procession consists of the priest carrying Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance at the head of a procession of all the faithful of the parish, including choir, bells, banners, first communicants, as it winds through the community, ending with all the faithful kneeling in adoration before the host as we celebrate Benediction. This procession represents the going forth into the world of the People of God, the Church, that is formed and fed by the Eucharistic Jesus, our manna keeping us alive on the journey, as we travel through history toward our final rest and glory, adoring Jesus in heaven. And just as the Israelites were led through the desert by a column of cloud through the day and column of fire by night, so we are led in procession by Jesus in the monstrance.

As Ratzinger said, we are, each of us, moving through history and time, trying to get to the promised land of heaven. But we Catholics are

not only on a private spiritual journey. We are also meant to be the hope of all nations, that they might see Jesus in the Eucharist, and in us, so that they too might join in the procession.

How could that happen? What are we disciples of Jesus meant to be? We are meant to be transparent vessels of the Eucharist we consume, letting Jesus show forth and shine out to the world. Our lives are meant to be music attracting the attention of the world as the bells and singing of the procession grab the attention of our neighbors.

There is an early Church document called The Letter to Diognetus. We don't know much about it except that it was probably written around 200 A.D. by an unknown author to someone called Diognetus. The author describes the role of Christians in the pagan, Roman world as follows, "[Christians] live in their own countries, but only as aliens . . . They marry like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not expose their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed . . . They obey the established laws, but in their own

lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted. They are unknown, and still condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich; they are dishonored, and in their very dishonor are glorified . . . they are reviled, and yet they bless . . . When they do good, they are punished as evil-doers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life.”

This is supposed to be who we Catholics are. Is that how our neighbors in Kirkland or Redmond see us? I know some of us are uncomfortable walking in the procession. When people look at the Corpus Christi Procession they may react with curiosity, incomprehension, even ridicule and sarcasm. But holy lives are believable – even when they claim that God is physically present right here on earth in the Eucharist.

The Letter to Diognetus goes on to describe the role of Jesus’ Disciples further. “What the soul is to the body, that Christians are in

the world . . . The soul is shut up in the body, and yet itself holds the body together; while Christians are restrained in the world as in a prison, and yet themselves hold the world together . . . It is no less a post than this that God has ordered them, and they must not try to evade it.”

This is our assignment from God. We must not evade it. What a role we have in history -- the soul of the world – the spiritual heart of humanity! What a journey we’re on! And how necessary and beautiful is the manna sustaining us on it. Jesus has given Himself to us as king, guide, presence, and food for this journey. That is why we adore our Savior in the Blessed Sacrament. That is why we process through the world today/tomorrow. This Corpus Christi let us present Jesus to our world so in need of Him – by our adoration of His Real Presence in sacrament – but also by our own lives made new and holy by our communion with Him.