

Feast of Corpus Christi, June 10, 2012

He fed them with the finest wheat and satisfied them with honey from the rock. Introit, Psalm 81

The latest chapter in the *Vatican Butler - Document Leak Affair* is that OTHER documents have surfaced after the Pope's butler has been jailed. So is the butler a scapegoat? Are there other leakers? Time will tell, but in the meantime the plot thickens. This week an Italian newspaper has printed some of the purloined documents. One is a letter from Cardinal Burke, the extremely conservative Bishop of Saint Louis who is now on the Vatican Curia. In this letter, Cardinal Burke complains to the Pope about the liturgical innovations of the Neo-Catechumenate. And those are the folks I celebrate Mass with several times every month!

So, what is amiss? Cardinal Burke tells the Pope what these folks are doing at Mass violates the Pope's own desires for the Liturgy.

This is all pertinent in relationship to today's feast: The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. Way back in the 5th century, Saint Augustine Bishop of Hippo, when greeting the newly initiated Catechumens of his day at their first reception of the Eucharist, told them: When the bishop says: "Corpus Christi" - you may respond, "Yes we are!"

This was a beautiful way to express that not only at Eucharist is bread and wine consecrated into the Body and Blood of Christ, but at the Eucharist, through Holy Communion, we human recipients are consecrated into the Mystical Body of Christ!

So it would seem to me that whatever we do in Liturgy that reinforces this sublime truth would be a very good thing. This brings us back to the condemnation of the Neo-Catechumenate Liturgy by Cardinal Burke. (This is a liturgy approved both by Pope John Paul II and by Pope Benedict.)

So what is special about the Neo-Catechumenate liturgy? Well there are several interesting nuances.

- For one, after the scripture readings, a microphone is present and is passed around and people in the pews are allowed to relate their own life experiences to the scripture they have just heard. And if St. Augustine is right and they are the Body of Christ, why should they not speak?
- Also, a joyful environment is aided by ringed flowers around the altar.
- The bread to be consecrated at Mass is baked by the participants.
- There are two large silver goblets of wine to be consecrated.
- Holy Communion is distributed always under both species of consecrated bread and wine.
- The sign of peace is given after the priest's homily.
- After the concluding prayers and last blessing, the participants form a circle around the altar and dance in rhythm while chanting a hymn.

The whole celebration is joyful and participative. Visitors who have attended have come away very enthused and impressed by the devotion and piety of the participants.

Is this somewhat different from your regular Sunday Eucharist. Somewhat, but not a lot. However what is different about it seems very appealing to the participants and those who observe.

I celebrate this Mass in Spanish, in which I am not well versed. I do understand: "A cold *cervesa* please!" However the Spanish is close enough to the Latin that I know what I am saying. The group I celebrate numbers about 50—all young. But here is the rub. This kind of liturgy could only be celebrated with such a small group to allow time for participants to make comments. And so the problem comes down to how to have enough priests to celebrate such liturgies. Only the future holds the answer to that question. I also think this type of liturgy IS the future.

As we celebrate Corpus Christi, it is well to recall the history of the Eucharist. The first Eucharist was celebrated in a small room on Holy Thursday. The Apostles reclined on the floor with the aid of pillows. There were no pews and no sanctuary. It was in the context of the Seder meal. In the first centuries, other Eucharists were all home liturgies as well.

The first Christian communities all met in homes. It was not until Constantine, the Roman Emperor in the fourth century was baptized, that the Church community really functioned publicly. After that - "basilicas" - government buildings were given over to the Church where Masses could be celebrated. Only at that time did the Church take on some of the trappings of the imperial court: using incense and the priests garbed in vestments like the officers of the empire!

And despite what some conservative Catholics believe, Latin was not spoken at the first Mass, and no doubt Greek was often spoken in homes. Latin was the language of the Roman Empire and ultimately became the Liturgical Language of the ROMAN RITE. There have been and still are other rites that have always and still do use other languages: Chaldean, Syrian, Greek, Russian, etc.

What all the rites, with their great varieties of liturgies, all share is the Eucharist. We all celebrate the Paschal Mystery and participate in the Body of Christ.

So the next time you receive the Holy Eucharist, you too may mentally respond:
Corpus Christi - "Yes we are!"