

Corpus Christi Procession: Q&A
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Corpus Christi this year falls on Sunday, June 3. In many places the annual procession with the Blessed Sacrament will be held. But why?

What does *Corpus Christi* mean?

The words “*Corpus Christi*” mean “Body of Christ” and are another name for the “Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ” celebrated on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday. This solemnity marks with particular emphasis the doctrine of Christ’s real presence—body, blood, soul, and divinity—in the Eucharist.

What is a *Corpus Christi* procession?

The *Corpus Christi* procession, most often held on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, is a “public profession of faith and worship of the Most Blessed Sacrament” (*Roman Ritual*). Founded upon the Church’s belief that Jesus becomes substantially present to us in the Eucharist at Mass, the *Corpus Christi* procession is one of the ways that we express our devotion to Christ (Eucharistic adoration, Forty Hours devotions, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament are some other forms of devotion).

A *Corpus Christi* procession usually begins after the celebration of Mass, at which the host for the procession is consecrated. Placed in a monstrance (a sacred vessel that displays the sacred host to the faithful), the Blessed Sacrament is then carried out of the church and through the streets of the city or neighborhood accompanied by the songs and prayers of the people. Often there are altars decorated along the route where the monstrance is placed and the people are blessed. In this way the Church shows that Christ, here among us, walks with us on our pilgrimage to heaven.

What are the origins of the *Corpus Christi* procession?

The *Corpus Christi* procession and many of the other Eucharistic devotions seem to have begun in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These devotions responded to a multitude of factors, among which were a greater appreciation and understanding of Christ’s Eucharistic presence and a desire to express this truth outwardly.

Influencing the rise in Eucharistic devotions in a very concrete manner were the visions of an Augustinian nun, Juliana of Liège, in 1209 that indicated an annual celebration devoted to the Body of Christ should be added to the Church’s calendar. In 1264, Pope Urban IV, who had resided in Liège and was familiar with Juliana’s visions, established the feast of the Body of Christ for the entire Church. St. Thomas Aquinas (d.1274) is said to have composed the liturgical texts for this new feast, as well as the hymns *O Salutaris Hostia* and *Tantum Ergo* (which are the last two stanzas of the hymn *Pange Lingua*) which are still sung today.

What is the relationship of the *Corpus Christi* procession to the Mass?

The Magisterium today is adamant that the *Corpus Christi* procession and all other Eucharistic devotions be understood as being rooted in the celebration of the Mass. One basic principle for every Eucharistic devotion is that they “must have an intrinsic reference to the Eucharistic Sacrifice, or dispose the faithful for its celebration, or prolong the worship which is essential to that Sacrifice” (*Directory on Popular Piety*, n.161). The celebration of the Eucharist, in the

words of Pope Benedict, “is itself the Church’s supreme act of adoration” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, n.66). Seen in this way, Eucharistic devotions and the Mass complement one another and are not in competition with each other.

Why should we participate in the *Corpus Christi* procession?

“The annual procession on the feast of *Corpus Christi*...has a special importance and meaning for the pastoral life of the parish or city.... When the Eucharist is carried through the street in a solemn procession with singing, the Christian people give public witness of faith and devotion toward the sacrament” (*Roman Ritual*). Says Pope John Paul II, “The devout participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic procession on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is a grace from the Lord which yearly brings joy to those who take part in it” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n.10).

Many parishes around the Diocese have had *Corpus Christi* processions in the past and will do so again this year. Bishop Callahan will also lead a Diocesan procession in La Crosse on June 3, beginning at 12:00 at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral. Everyone in the Diocese is welcome and encouraged to attend.

Why is 2018 a special year for our Diocesan *Corpus Christi* Procession?

Corpus Christi in 2018 combines two noteworthy anniversaries. First, the Diocese of La Crosse was born 150 years ago by the papal decree of Blessed Pope Pius IX on March 3, 1868. Second, 15 years ago, Pope St. John Paul II taught that the Church draws her life from the Eucharist. His 2003 Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, “On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church,” teaches: “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*.... [T]he Eucharist builds the Church, and the Church makes the Eucharist” (nos. 1, 26). Thus, our Diocese is itself born from the Eucharist, and we thank God for both gifts on this feast in 2018.

“In the humble signs of bread and wine,” Pope John Paul concludes his letter, “changed into the body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope” (n.62). In 2018 we pray that the Diocese of La Crosse continue to draw life from the Eucharist, journey faithfully in the years ahead, and be a sign of hope for all in our part of Wisconsin.