

## Refection for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi

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I would like to begin our reflection by telling the little known story of how the Church came to have a feast of Corpus Christi, and its link to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, our beloved and venerable Order.

**Juliana of Mount Cornillion** was Norbertine Canoness (Nun) living in the Belgian city of Leige in the early 1200s. Due to the family's great poverty, her parents left her in the care of the nuns at the age of five, and she was raised at the convent. All her life Juliana was a woman of deep prayer. When she was sixteen she took vows and officially became a nun at the convent. Soon after she entered, she began having mystical experiences. One vision that would often re-occur, was a vision of the whole world in total darkness, expect for the light that came from the Eucharist at Mass. Several times, she heard the voice of our Lord say that He desired a feast day in the Church for all people to reflect on the Eucharist. After each vision, Juliana would share these experiences with her religious superior. She felt a call to spread devotion to Eucharist and establish a universal feast to honor the Blessed Sacrament. However, both her Superior and her community was rather lax and showed no interest in spreading devotion to the Eucharist.

After twenty years in the convent as a nun, Juliana was elected as the mother superior. However, her efforts to reform the convent and spread devotion to the Eucharist were not well received. Sadly, her own nuns eventually kicked her out of her own the convent. This holy woman chose to still live her vows outside of the convent, sometimes being forced to live on the street as a beggar, or seek temporary shelter at local churches and convents. During this time, Juliana still led a life of prayer and penance, and still had mystical experiences of the Eucharist.

During this difficult time Juliana befriended the Archdeacon of Leige, **Jacques Pantaleon**. The archdeacon oversaw all the programs for Catholic Charities in the city, often helping hand out food and clothing to the homeless. He was a very humble and saintly man, advanced in years, and known for his strong faith. The archdeacon spent many hours praying with Juliana, and listening to her recount her visions and mystical experiences of the Eucharist. Juliana shared that she had no idea as to why God would ask her, a nun, and now a woman living on the streets, to begin a feast day in the Church to honor the Blessed Sacrament. Sadly, Juliana died alone in a cloistered monastery 1258.

Almost at the same time, Archdeacon Jacques Pantaleon was named as the Bishop of Verdun, a small city in the northeast of France. After only two years there, to his great surprise, the Pope named him the Archbishop of Jerusalem.

At that time, the Crusades were being fought in the Holy Land. Catholic kings brought their armies to defend the holy sites. Catholic Orders of consecrated knights (Knights of Templar and Knights of St. John – today's Order of Malta) likewise fought to protect the holy sites and pilgrims, especially the sick and wounded.

Sadly there was a great deal of political in-fighting among the kings and those leading the crusaders. To solve the problem, the Pope at the time (Alexander IV) decided to select a bishop for Jerusalem who did not belong to any of these kings or their chaplains. The pope searched for an outsider, known for his holiness, and love of the poor. Eventually the pope selected Jacques Pantaleon, the former archdeacon of Liege, and now bishop of Verdun.

The pope sent him to Jerusalem on a mission to save the holy sites, care for the poor, and foster peace among the Christian crusaders. He was also ordered to come to Rome one year later to give an "in person" report directly to the Pope. Pantaleon did indeed bring peace to Jerusalem, but when he arrived in Rome a year later, he discovered that the pope had just died, and the cardinals (all eight of them) were in a conclave that had been going on for three months. There was great anxiety as the cardinals were having trouble electing a new pope.

The cardinals were under pressure from several kings, and even some Church leaders, to elect particular candidates as the next pope. After three months of not being able to agree on a candidate, the cardinals agreed to select a non-cardinal – a complete outsider - someone known for their holiness, their love of the poor, and their ability to be a peacemaker. To everyone’s surprise, the conclave elected Jacques Pantaleon, the newly named Archbishop of Jerusalem, and he took the name Pope Urban IV.

Only a short time after election, the new pope took time off to pray in the countryside. But his vacation was quickly interrupted by news that in the neighboring village of Orvieto, a miracle had taken place, and the local bishop was asking the pope to visit and venerate the miracle. A young German priest, struggling with doubts about his faith, was on a pilgrimage to Rome and stopped to say Mass at a local parish in the village of Orvieto. Having doubts during the words of consecration, the host miraculously turned to human flesh, and bleed in his hands. Pope Urban IV came, and declared it a miracle. The pope also called for his friend, and well known theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas to come and venerate the host with him.

A few weeks later, Pope Urban IV issued a papal bull establishing the feast of Corpus Christi on the church’s liturgical calendar, so that each year the Church could reflect on the gift of the Eucharist. In the bull, he described that Eucharist as a source of light that gives faith to a world in darkness. (It was the exact image that Juliana of Liege had seen in her mystical visions, and had spoken about many years earlier when she prayed with the archdeacon). Based upon his visit with Pope Urban IV to the miracle of Orvieto, St. Thomas Aquinas would later compose the prayers of the Mass we use on Corpus Christi, and compose several hymns – we know them today as *Pange lingua*, *Tantum ergo*, and *Panis angelicus*.

Pope Urban IV died after a short three year papacy. His lasting gift to the Church was the establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi.

In 1869, Pope Pius IX canonized St. Juliana of Leige, and gave her the name “the Apostle of the Blessed Sacrament”.

Let me conclude our reflection by a few words from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Part II of the Catechism speaks so beautifully of this great gift.

The Eucharist is our participation in the death and resurrection of the Lord.

The Eucharist is a living memorial, that makes real before us, the one true and perfect sacrifice of the Son to the Father, for our salvation.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.

The Mass is inseparable from the sacrifice of the cross, and the resurrection. Not symbolic, it is making present before us the same events of Calvary that give us life and salvation.

There is no surer pledge of our hope of heaven than the Eucharist.

All other sacraments, all ministries, and all apostolates in the Church, point us to the Eucharist, and have fruitfulness because of the Eucharist.

This coming weekend, and always, let us give thank for the great of the Eucharist. For as Jesus Himself declared, "Whoever eats this bread, will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world". Amen.