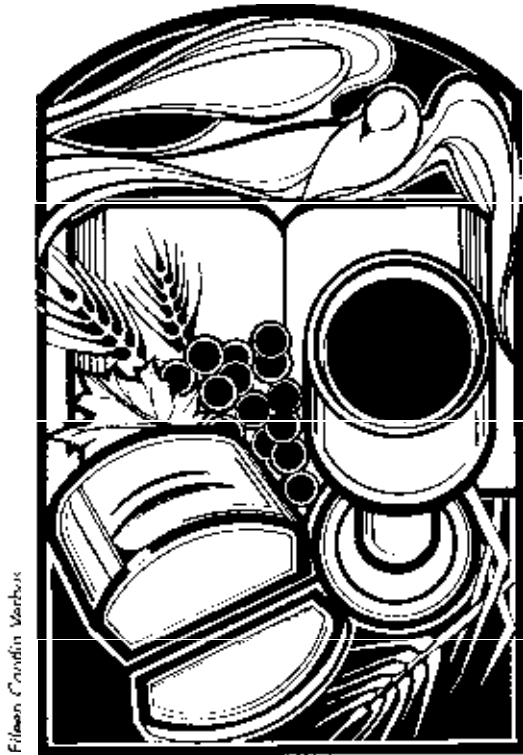


## Parish Celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi



*This Celebration is modeled after the many festive meals Jesus celebrated with his disciples (both male and female) and the marginalized members of his own Jewish tradition: tax collectors, sinners, beggars, and prostitutes . The celebration is ideally held in the context of a parish potluck supper on the feast of Corpus Christi or surrounding date.*

*If the parish has an outreach to the marginalized, for example the divorced and remarried, persons with AIDS, women, homeless street people or a twinned relationship with a city parish, invite these groups to help with the planning and execution . Also, invite members of these groups who have the gifts, to serve as leaders of prayer and worship.*

*Invite a local biblical or theological expert to give a presentation on Eucharist and issues surrounding its celebration in our 21st century church.*

*It is estimated that the entire program will take about three hours, though this could be reduced by eliminating the speaker or substituting simple refreshment for the meal.*

**Opening Song:** *One Bread One Body*  
(c.1978 by John Foley S.J. as found in Today's Music Issue, Oregon Catholic Press).

*(Have copies of the following readings available in program form for each person present..tell them ahead of time that these will provide "something to chew on" and to discuss over the meal).*

**Reading I:** (From Fr. Albert Nolan's book: *Jesus Before Christianity* Orbis Books, 1992 eighth printing, 1999. Reprinted with permission).

“John the Baptist preached to sinners. Hanina ben Dosa exorcised evil spirits from them. But Jesus identified with them. He went out of his way to mix socially with beggars, tax collectors and prostitutes.

In societies where there are barriers between classes, races or other status groups, the separation is maintained by means of a taboo on social mixing....In the Middle East sharing a meal at table with someone is a particularly intimate form of association and friendship. They would never even out of politeness eat and drink with a person of a lower class or status or with any person of whom they disapproved.

“The scandal Jesus caused in that society by mixing socially with sinners can hardly be imagined by most people in the modern world today. It meant that he accepted them and approved of them and that he actually wanted to be “a *friend* of tax collectors and sinners” (Mt. 11:19). The effect upon the poor and the oppressed themselves was miraculous.

That Jesus did mix socially with sinners is an assured historical fact. ...

“This man,” they said, “entertains sinners and feasts with them”. (Lk15:2)

“When he was *reclining* [at dinner] in his house, a number of tax collectors and sinners were *reclining* with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many of them among his followers” (Mk 2:15, compare Mt 9:10; Lk 5:29)

“And you say, look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” ( Lk 7:34 = Mt. 11:19)

“....The fact that guests were invited and the fact that they reclined at table show that that the meals referred to in the gospels were feasts or dinner parties. At ordinary family meals to which guests had not been invited people sat upright at table in much the same way as we do. One reclined only at a feast or dinner party. Feasts or dinner parties need not be thought of as very elaborate and expensive meals (Lk 10:38-42). The company and conversation mattered more than the food....”

“Jesus himself attached great importance to these festive gatherings. He sometimes hired a dining-room in an inn to celebrate with his followers. The last supper was indeed the last of many such suppers. After his death his followers kept up his memory by continuing to break bread together. This was how he had wished to be remembered - in the context of a festive meal. “Do this in memory of me.” (1 Cor 11:24,25) (*Jesus Before Christianity*, pp 46-49).

***Sung Response:*** *Taste and See* (c. 1983 James E. Moore Jr.) or *Blest Are They* (c. 1985 David Haas G.I.A. Publications) or *Servant Song*. Both found in Music 2001, Oregon Catholic Press.

***Reading II:*** (Reprinted with permission from Sr. Sandra Schneiders' book: *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Crossroad,1999).

“Let us turn now to the scene in which Mary plays the major role, the anointing at Bethany (Jn 12:1-8). The scene has certain eucharistic overtones, which ought not to be overlooked. It is situated six days before the Passover, which according to John’s chronology of the passion, falls on the following Saturday (see Jn 19:31). The meal at Bethany, therefore, took place on Sunday evening, the customary time of the Eucharist in the early church. Those whom Jesus loved (see Jn 11:3,5) gave a supper for him, and we are told that Martha “served.” The Greek verb for “serve” is diakonein. By the time John’s Gospel was written at the end of the first century the term diakonos, “servant,” had become the title of a recognized ministerial office in some Christian communities (see Phil.1:1; 1 Tim.3:8, 12-13;Rom 16:1), and waiting on table a function conferred by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:1-6).....”

“I do not wish to defend the hypothesis that the supper at Bethany is presented explicitly as a “sacrament” in the strict sense of the term. But it does seem to be evocative of Eucharist, and within that perspective it is worth noting that Jesus is the guest of honor and Martha and Mary are the ministers, a presentation of Eucharist that would fit well in the setting of the Johannine community. A loved male disciple, Lazarus, was present, but simply as one of those at table with Jesus.” (pp. 107-108)

***Meal commences.***

***Blessing prayer before eating:*** *Blessed are you, God of all the Universe who has given us this food and drink brought forth from the earth, which you have given as our home and our sustenance. May our gathering today (tonight) be a blessing for our bodies and provide nourishment for our souls. We eat and drink in your honor so that we too may become living sacraments of praise as was the firstborn of your new creation, our Brother Jesus the Christ, Amen.*

***As the meal draws to a close...****Invite those at table to share their reflections about the two readings. (15-20 minutes)*

***Sharing:*** *Once the reflections have ended...invite someone from each table to share their table's reflections with the rest of the group. Someone write these on newsprint.*

***Presentation by local expert:*** *(Hopefully he or she can incorporate the experience of those present (40 minutes).*

***Question and Answer:*** *(10-15 minutes)*

***Gathering the Wisdom....Moving to Action:*** *Invite people to consider all they have experienced, consider what the Spirit's invitation might to each person and to the parish. If the learnings/actions are clear enough to be named, list on newsprint. Invite those who seem most energized by these proposed actions/issues to take them for later consideration by the appropriate parish or community group (ie parish council, social justice groups, etc )or to form a new group (15-20 minutes).*

***Closing Prayer: A Psalm of Partnership in Ministry***

Side One: We are partners in the mystery of redemption, partners in the mystery of reconciliation, partners in the misery of the world's population, partners in the way of the cross.

Side Two: We are partners in the ministry of service, partners in the ministry of justice and peace, partners in the liturgy of church and life, partners in healing and hope.

Side One: Together we reach out to touch the untouchables.

Side Two: Together we move out to teach the taught.

Side One: Together we stand up to preach right practice.

Side Two: Together we practice what we preach.

Side One: Ours is the gift of good company on days when there's nobody else there beside us.

Side Two: Ours is the gift of affirming the ways of the God Who is working within us.

Side One: Blessed is the partnership rooted in love that spills over, spreads over, covers over everything negative and uninspiring.

Side Two: Blessed is the fellowship partnership shares with its circle of friends and supporters.

Side One: God of Relationship, bless this relationship, strengthen this partnership deepen this fellowship, let it be a symbol of Your mode of Being and sign of your own noncompetitive ways.

Side Two : God of Companionship, may we be supportive, may we be effective, bringing to life all the best in each other so that we might help others see good in themselves.

All: Thank You O God for the gift and the grace of partnership in the mystery of living.  
(From *Miriam Therse Winter: WomanWord*, Crossroad, 1995. Used with permission)

**Closing Song:** *Companions on the Journey* (c. 1986 by Carey Landry as found in Music 2001 Oregon Catholic Press) Alternatively *Anthem* (c.1978 New Dawn Music ) or *God Has Chosen Me* (c.1990 Bernadette Farrell). Both in Music 2001, Oregon Catholic Press.

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