


# The Church

## Corpus Christi

T was a grateful Church that instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi. The Church is ever mindful of the wonderful gift it possesses in Christ in the Tabernacle. It has, therefore, set aside one day each year to celebrate most solemnly the Feast of Christ in the Eucharist. The Church, it is true, celebrates the institution of the Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday. But during Holy Week the thoughts of Christ's Passion and death are so vivid, and the sorrowful events of that tragic week crowd one another so rapidly that the celebration of Holy Thursday does not sound fully its joyful note. The Church, therefore, considered it fitting to select a day for additional reverence and thanks and solemn adoration of the Holy Eucharist. Accordingly the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday has been selected for the more joyful commemoration. In our country, however, the public celebration occurs on the Sunday following the Feast.

The institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi is inseparably linked with Juliana of Liege. The life of Juliana, an Augustinian nun, was marked by an especial devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. One of her most cherished desires was to see a special feast in honor of the Body of Christ. It is claimed that God favored her with a vision which indicated the appropriateness of such a feast. In this vision the Church appeared as a full moon splendid in its soft light, but with one dark spot on its golden surface. The dark spot was the absence of the solemnity of Corpus Christi. From time to time as occasion presented, St. Juliana made known her cherished idea to a number of ecclesiastics, among whom were Jacques Pantaleon, afterwards Pope Urban IV, and the learned Dominican, Cardinal Hugh de St. Cher.

Juliana did not live to see the Feast of Corpus Christi universally established; for not until 1264, six years after her death, did Pope Urban IV order the annual celebration of Corpus

Christi on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. Pope Urban died within a month after issuing his decree and, as a consequence, the extension of the festival was delayed. But succeeding Popes took up the cause and published new decrees, especially Clement V, who, in the General Council of Vienne (1311), definitely established the solemnity of the Feast. Other Popes have from time to time endowed it with additional indulgences, and since early in the fourteenth century the observance of the Feast has been universal.

The celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi has a special place in Dominican affections, for the divine office of the Feast was composed by St. Thomas Aquinas. Tradition has it that Pope Urban IV gave instructions to St. Bonaventure, as well as to St. Thomas, to compose the office. The Franciscan and Dominican friars were intimate friends and it is related that when St. Bonaventure read the office constructed by St. Thomas he was so impressed with its beauty and sweetness that he cast his own effort into the fire.

Indeed, the office of Corpus Christi is generally acknowledged to be one of the most sublime and poetical in the whole breviary. The "O Salutaris Hostia" and the "Tantum Ergo," sung at Benediction, are the closing verses of two of the hymns of the office composed by St. Thomas. The Very Rev. Rodger Bede Vaughn, O.S.B., in his life of St. Thomas, commenting upon the beautiful office of Corpus Christi, says: "What writer has so fixed his name in every Sanctuary or has made ten thousand churches ring for hundreds of years with such an ever-repeated, never omitted anthem of joy and praise? He who lived at the foot of the altar and drunk of the dew of Heaven, he whose conversation was with the Saints of God, had learnt, as no other, how to throw into human words an angel's song."

In the United States the public solemnity of Corpus Christi takes place on the Sunday after Trinity. The procession of the Blessed Sacrament and the three Benedictions are notable features of this celebration. Many rich indulgences have been granted to the faithful for devotion to the Blessed Sacrament on this day. All the faithful, who perform either publicly or privately pious exercises of one hour on this day in memory of the institution of the Blessed Sacrament and who receive Holy Communion, may gain a plenary indulgence.