

Opening the Word: Eucharistic comedy

✘ When I hear the word “comedy,” I’m tempted to think about the hilarity of Will Farrell or Adam Sandler. This temptation reduces the comic to the absurd or laughable.

Yet, that’s not the only meaning of the word comedy. Comedy in literature often referred to a plot that culminated in a happy ending. In Dante’s “Divine Comedy,” the poet is given a glimpse of heaven, entering for a moment into the very leisure of God.

If we approach comedy in this way, then we’re forced to admit that the Eucharist makes present the greatest comedy of all time: the death and resurrection of the beloved Son.

To acknowledge the “comic” dimensions of the Eucharist does not require us to bracket out the very real drama of salvation made available through the Eucharist. In a foreshadowing of the Eucharist, Moses takes the blood of bulls, splashes it upon the altar and then sprinkles the nascent community of Israel. A covenant is established where a violent death (that of bulls) becomes a source of life.

<u>Feast of Corpus Christi – June 3, 2018</u>
EX 24:3-8
PS 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18
HEB 9:11-15
MK 14:12-16, 22-26

This dramatic image is taken up in Hebrews. This time, the great high priest Jesus has sprinkled all the nations not with the blood of bulls but with his own flesh and blood. Through this offering of total love, men and women have been redeemed to worship the living God. There’s a happy ending after all.

On Holy Thursday, we heard St. Paul's rendering of the Last Supper. But on the feast of Corpus Christi, we turn to Jesus' own final words. At a Passover meal, commemorating the great comedy of Israel's liberation from the slavery of Egypt, Jesus takes bread. He takes a cup. And he establishes the new covenant of his blood.

These central images of Israel's identity, bread and wine, now becomes signs that make available the presence of Christ's sacrifice of love. Each time the Church offers the sacrifice of the Eucharist in parishes throughout the world, the comedy of divine salvation is repeated.

The Eucharist, importantly, is thus not a quaint meal, a "symbolic" remembering of what Jesus did once upon a time. Rather, at every Mass, the divine comedy of love is once again available to us. God has entered permanently into history, dwelling among us even in a small tabernacle in the tiniest chapel in the most remote corner of the world.

The feast of Corpus Christi is a celebration of this extraordinary comic news. Sure, we pilgrims on the way are awaiting the moment where God will be all-in-all. We are learning to long for God's presence not in sacramental signs but face-to-face.

But along the way, the presence of Christ's sacrificial love keeps us company. As we enter into the leisure of summer, we must let the Eucharistic comedy enter into every part of our lives – whether that is in long nights spent on summer stoops, in trips to the ocean or mountains, in time spent with family, and in backyard BBQs, Jesus Christ is here.

So this summer, we must let the words of the hymn for Corpus Christi become our own, "Jesus, of your love befriend us,/You refresh us, you defend us,/Your eternal goodness send us/In the land of life to see" (Thomas Aquinas, *Lauda Sion*).

The Eucharistic comedy, as it turns out, is only the beginning

of our salvation. For the self-giving love of the Word made flesh is to cultivate in us a taste for eternal life with God.

The ultimate comedy.

Timothy P. O'Malley, Ph.D., is managing director of the McGrath Institute for Church Life.