

THE REAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST; JUNE 23, 2019

I remember the first time I saw the movie *The Mission*. Jeremy Irons plays a Spanish Jesuit priest, Fr. Gabriel, who goes into the South American wilderness to build a mission in the hope of converting the natives of the region. When Spain sells the colony to Portugal, Fr. Gabriel and his brothers are forced to defend all they have built against Portuguese aggressors who come to enslave the villagers. The movie ends with Fr. Gabriel sacrificing his life in the face of this invasion as he leads the native converts in a procession behind the Most Holy Eucharist which is carried at the head of the group in a monstrance. The Jesuit and his followers are shot down, despite being unarmed, and the monstrance containing the Body of Christ falls to the ground in desecration and defeat. What stayed with me was the manner in which the Presence was carried forth with such adoration, love and honor.

Our worship of the consecrated host is, of course, both proper and good since such behavior follows directly from the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence. Through the power of Jesus Christ, the one high priest of our religion as mediated through his ordained clergy, the gifts of bread and wine are transubstantiated into Christ himself. This is so not just because you and I believe it, but because God promises it. For this reason we reserve unconsumed consecrated hosts in the Tabernacle at the end of Mass and why we dare to bow down in adoration before either the Tabernacle or a host exposed for Benediction. Fr. Gabriel carrying the host in procession was a

statement to the forces of evil that we place our hope in Christ alone and not in the violent powers of this fallen world. Though the agents of this world seem to trample heedlessly this humble manifestation of divine power, we know otherwise for authentic power lies in faith and in the many sacrifices of love which inevitably attend it.

Yet we must remember that we aren't called to simply follow behind a host raised in front of a procession of the faithful, as stirring a witness as this might be. In fact the primary purpose of the Holy Mass is not to make present such consecrated hosts for adoration. Indeed, holy though a Tabernacle or a monstrance is when it contains the Presence of Christ, how much more so ourselves as we eat his Body and Drink his blood in the hope that we may become fitting Temples of the Holy Spirit. I beg you therefore not to let ritual dull your appreciation for just how marvelous a gift we are called to receive, nor forget the dignity of the goal towards which we continue to journey - a goal in which we already participate through our willing reception of nothing other nor less than the Body and Blood of the Son of God himself.