



It was Corpus Christi in 2010. I was in Orvieto, a small hilltop town in the Umbria region of Italy. Orvieto is famous for its white wine and more famous for a relic of a Eucharistic miracle. During the middle ages a priest doubted the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist as he was celebrating mass, and the host started to bleed. The blood fell onto a large white cloth, called a “corporal”. This cloth is venerated in Orvieto, and the townspeople actually built a whole Cathedral to hold it. Every year on the feast of Corpus Christi, there is a really special mass, and then there’s a several-mile-long procession around the town with the miraculous piece of cloth.

I went with a bunch of my seminarian friends for the mass and procession. The mass itself was about two hours long, plus we waited in the Church for about an hour afterwards as the procession formed. So when we finally started walking, we were really tired, to say the least.

And it was a typical Italian day: hot and sunny. At first everything went fine. We were in the back of the procession just in front of the miraculous cloth, which was carried by four big strong guys in a huge gold holder. But after a mile or so of trudging along cobblestone streets, the heat and the sun started to get to me. I was thirsty and tired, and getting burnt. The beautiful procession was turning – at least for me – into an inferno.

And then it happened. It was only a moment, but what a glimpse of paradise I had! It was on one of the back streets of the town, just by a cliff. The brown stone houses had blended together in my mind into one drab row of baking rock. When all of a sudden I felt a cool breeze blowing on my left cheek. It was so refreshing. I turned and caught a view of heaven. I was looking into a small Church. Candles lit the walls, and candles in the

shape of a huge heart were spread across the floor. Up by the altar were arrayed row upon row of sisters – poor clare sisters I think– the kind who stay cloistered all the time and only come out for the Corpus Christi procession. They were singing some angelic hymn, and the whole Church was resonating like some gigantic speaker with their beautiful song. Strewn around them and across the floor and around the heart shaped candles were rose petals – thousands of them.

Processing through the streets of Orvieto

It was but a moment, but one beautiful, glorious moment. And then it was gone. We kept walking, the drab brown stone reappeared, the heat and the sun beat down upon us again, and the procession continued.

And I had seen what heaven must be like.

This earth is a valley of tears. Blood, sweat, mud, muck, sorrow, and tears. Yes, there are beautiful moments, but nothing compares to what will come hereafter. So often we live for what we find here below – money, possessions, pleasure, power, honor, glory... and those things never fill us up. They leave us empty.

We were made for heaven. And anything short of heaven will not fill us. We will never find true happiness here below. Our life here, and all the tough moments it is made of, only makes sense as a preparation for heaven. Heaven, which isn't some sort of dry, dull, endless sitting around. No! Heaven is life like it should be, life with no end, romance with no limits, beauty with no boundaries. Fullness. Completeness. True happiness and peace. I had a little taste of it there in Orvieto, and I'd be willing to bet many of you have had similar experiences.

One of the most wonderful parts is being able to be so close to the Eucharist. Being a priest doesn't make you any holier than anyone else nor does it make it easier for you to get to heaven. But so often you are closer to the One who is in heaven, who will bring us there, the One who is truly present in the bread and wine. What a gift!