*That they may have life*by Bishop Chad W. Zielinski

*Corpus Christi procession*

*June 15, 1995, in Monterrey, Mexico*

As a seminarian in the summer of 1995, I took part in a Spanish language immersion course in Monterrey, Mexico. While there, two other seminarians and I were assigned to work with Fr. Jose in a parish in the Archdiocese of Monterrey when we were not attending class. This parish assignment provided numerous pastoral opportunities to be immersed in the Mexican Catholic culture. Fr. Jose briefed us about the upcoming major celebration for “Jueves de Corpus Christi” (Corpus Christi Thursday) that we, as seminarians, would be involved in. The Solemnity of Corpus Christi in Mexico is celebrated in June on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday. My experience participating in Eucharistic processions up to then was limited to inside a church building or a procession around the city block of the church building.

I vividly recall that as we gathered on Thursday midday, a marching band was the first group to show up. I asked the priest for a reason for the marching band, and he looked at me quite dismayed, saying: “It is for Our Lord.”

Gradually, people would gather, and in time there would be two more marching bands. I grew up in a small town, and my parade experience was nothing compared to this group of hundreds getting into formation; one marching band at the head, one somewhere in the middle, and one at the end. Behind the first marching band were six men carrying a platform built upon two large wooden beams. There were loads of beautiful flowers around the periphery of the platform, with a smaller heightened platform in the middle covered in white. This is where the monstrance was placed with Our Lord’s Eucharistic presence. Covering the entire platform was a very regal-looking canopy. It reminded me of pictures of antiquity when the servants of a king or queen would carry them in a procession. The other seminarians and I held a candle, a processional Cross, or incense.

Before the procession began, I wondered why all these people, along with this ornate platform, canopy, and marching bands, were gathered just to go around the block. Little did I know that the procession would last four to five hours and wind its way through the various streets of the local area for what seemed like several miles!

As the marching band fired up the enthusiasm of the crowds in the procession, we made our way through the parish and school grounds. As we entered the first neighborhood, I was shocked to see thousands of people, five to 10 people deep, lining the streets. They were in their Sunday best, displaying an array of colors that reflected their local cultural attire. As the canopy with Our Lord passed by, they would lay bouquets of flowers on the street. I vividly have imprinted in my mind several individuals kneeling on cement streets with tears rolling down their faces. People were bowing, falling to their knees, showing a profound belief and love of Our Lord in their pious actions.

Throughout the procession, we would periodically stop at a home that displayed an ornate altar in the front yard near the street. The monstrance would be placed on the altar, the prayers that accompanied adoration would be said, and the priest would offer benediction to the thousands gathered in the area.

As the procession moved along, with thousands lining the street, some people would join us for part of the distance. I recall them chanting passionately, “Viva El Cristo Rey!” (Long live Christ, the King). I would later learn that this chant originated from the oppression of the Church during the mid-1920s in Mexico, when priests and lay faithful were imprisoned, beaten, or martyred for the public practice of their Catholic faith or for simply wearing clerical attire. I was deeply moved by the display of passion, publicly proclaiming that Jesus is their king.

Another chant that was repeated countless times was “Señor, Danos sacerdotes, Danos muchos sacerdotes, Danos muchos muy santos sacerdotes” (Lord, give us priests, Give us many priests, Give us many very holy priests). I was touched by the zealous request to God for priests. Some would walk with me to pray and offer support.

All of this honor, love, and devotion of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist remains alive in my heart, mind, and soul today. What a priceless blessing that increased my love for the Eucharist.