News
Season of Faithful Witness

Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala carries the Eucharist during a Corpus Christi procession from the Shrine of the Sacred Heart to the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle June 7, 2026, in Washington. (OSV News/Catholic Standard/Mihoko Owada)

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The noonday sun shone over Columbia Heights in Northwest Washington as people moved between corner markets and families pushed strollers past Salvadoran pupuserías, Dominican and Mexican restaurants, pho shops and fruit vendors shaded beneath bright umbrellas.

In that same neighborhood, every pew inside the Shrine of the Sacred Heart was filled June 7 as worshippers gathered beneath mosaic-covered walls where immigrants have prayed for more than a century.

"The Jesus who gives himself to us in the Eucharist is also present in each one of his sons and daughters, especially in those who suffer, the vulnerable, the forgotten and those who carry heavy burdens," Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala said in his homily connecting the celebration of the Eucharist to the suffering and dignity of

immigrants.

Menjivar-Ayala, a Washington auxiliary bishop appointed by Pope Leo XIV May 1 as the new bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, celebrated the Spanish-language Mass for the solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known as Corpus Christi Sunday.

Bishop-designate Emilio Biosca Agüero – the Sacred Heart pastor named by the pope May 13 as the new bishop of Venice, Florida – concelebrated the Mass along with priests from across the Archdiocese of Washington.

Following the Mass, hundreds of Catholics joined in a Eucharistic procession, walking in solidarity with immigrants from the Shrine of the Sacred Heart to the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle.

The Mass and procession in the nation's capital were part of the Season of Faithful Witness rooted in prayer and Eucharistic devotion to show solidarity with immigrants amid the Trump administration's hardline immigration enforcement policies and mass deportation push. This witness, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Corpus Christi, has been observed across the country.

In Pittsburgh, members of Pittsburgh Area Pax Christi gathered for a Corpus Christi prayer vigil.

Nearly 250 people in New York City processed through the city to publicly affirm the dignity of every person. The witness drew clergy, religious, lay leaders, parishioners and community members.

In La Crosse, Wisconsin, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration partnered with Viterbo University to host a Eucharistic procession. The daylong Wisconsin event began with Mass at the university's San Damiano Chapel, and the procession through the city made prayer stops focused on access to healthcare, education and housing. It ended with Eucharistic adoration and Benediction at Mary of the Angels Chapel at the Franciscans' convent. More than 80 people participated in the event, which concluded with a shared meal and fellowship.

In Washington, Menjivar-Ayala said in his homily that immigrant families often walk paths marked by uncertainty and sacrifice while searching for safety, work and dignity, trusting only in the providence of God.

Drawing from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Menjivar-Ayala said in his homily that the Eucharist unites Catholics not only to Jesus Christ, but to one another.

"We are the body of Christ," he said. "And if we are one body, then when one member suffers, all suffer with that member. ... We cannot adore Jesus in the monstrance and then ignore him when he appears in the face of the migrant, the refugee, the poor and the fearful."

"The Eucharist moves us beyond ourselves so that we may accompany those most in need of our closeness," he said. "It calls us to build communities where no one feels like a stranger, where no one is left alone in suffering, and where all may discover that they are beloved sons and daughters of God."

Hundreds of faithful participated in a Eucharistic procession along 16th Street and Rhode Island Avenue following the Mass. Along the route, the procession stopped at various stations of prayer, where testimonies were shared about the difficult situation faced by many immigrants who lack legal authorization to live and work in the U.S.

Some prayed the rosary while others sang hymns in Spanish and English. Families carried banners, pushed strollers and held photographs of loved ones and community members detained or deported amid immigration proceedings.

Incense smoke drifted upward from thuribles carried by altar servers as pedestrians stopped to watch, record the procession on their phones or ask, "What's going on?" as it passed by.

Organized by the archdiocese's Office of Justice and Peace, the procession was rooted in the Catholic belief that Jesus Christ is truly present – body, blood, soul and divinity – in the Eucharist.

Beneath a white-and-gold canopy, Menjivar-Ayala, Agüero and Bishop-designate Robert P. Boxie – the latter was named by Pope Leo on May 1 to be a new auxiliary bishop of Washington – took turns carrying the monstrance holding the Blessed Sacrament during the nearly two-mile procession.

At several points along the route, the procession paused at temporary altars prepared by parish communities and ministries from across the archdiocese, including St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, Holy Trinity Parish in

Washington, and St. Martin of Tours Parish in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Jaime Ortiz, a member of the Knights of Columbus at Sacred Heart, stated that accompanying the Blessed Sacrament through the streets of the U.S. capital represents a gesture of solidarity with thousands of people who are migrants and who have been detained or deported.

"The feast of Corpus Christi reminds us that we must defend the dignity of people, strengthen our parish communities, and bear witness to hope," said Ortiz, according to reports from El Pregonero, the Spanish-language news outlet of the Archdiocese of Washington.

Among the participants were Alexander and Sulma Cruz, a Salvadoran couple from the St. Rose of Lima Parish in Gaithersburg, who attended with their young daughter.

"We want to show that we are a living Church in solidarity with our migrant brothers and sisters who are suffering today. We also wish to pass on to our daughter the faith we received from our parents and grandparents," the couple said.

For Jorge Cabanilla, a leader of the Brotherhood of the Lord of Miracles of Washington and a parishioner of Our Lady Queen of the Americas, the presence of bishops, priests and religious sisters in the procession was a sign of pastoral closeness to the Hispanic community.

"There is fear of immigration raids, family separation and unemployment, which affects many households. Today we feel that we are not alone and that, through prayer, hope for a dignified solution always emerges," Cabanilla said.

Arthur Laffin, a member of Holy Redeemer Parish in Washington and the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker Movement, carried a sign reading, "Love your neighbor means welcome the immigrant. Don't detain and deport them."

Laffin said public Eucharistic processions give Catholics an opportunity to stand in solidarity with immigrants and others in need.

"We're sending the message that we are all part of the body of Christ, and when one suffers, we all suffer," he told Catholic Standard, the English-language newspaper of the Washington Archdiocese.

"What we've seen over the last several months is that many Catholics are looking for ways to connect their faith to the pressing challenges facing their communities," said Sergio Lopez, national director of mission and leadership formation at Catholics in Communion, one of the groups behind the Season of Faithful Witness.

The "season" began on Ash Wednesday and ended on Corpus Christi, but the feast day "is not the finish line for this work – it's a milestone," Lopez said in a statement.

"As we move forward, we'll continue supporting public witness," he said, "strengthening Catholic leadership, accompanying immigrant families and other vulnerable communities, and helping Catholics live out their responsibility to participate in public life in ways that advance human dignity and the common good."

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