

The Guard of Honor of the B. Sacrament.

Benediction

Among the many beautiful devotions of Catholic practice certainly the grandest, after the Holy Sacrifice itself, is Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. To all lovers of Jesus Eucharistic, to those especially who are banded together in an Association devoted to His honor and glory, this devotion must be very dear.

The devotion finds its origin in several different practices of the faithful during the four or five hundred years preceding the seventeenth century. Early in the thirteenth century a special virtue came to be attached to looking upon the Blessed Sacrament. The idea was even carried to devout excess. The elevation came to be regarded as the vital part of the Mass; the thurifer received strict orders not to allow the clouds of incense to rise to the point of obscuring the Host; and in some parts of Spain a black velvet screen was constructed back of the altar in order that the priest's hands, holding aloft the Sacred Host, might be thrown out in clear relief and be easily discernible at some distance.

Accordingly after the institution of Corpus Christi in 1246, it became a practice to carry the Sacred Host in a transparent vessel during the processions. Later there grew up a custom especially in Germany, of having constant exposition. On this however a compromise was reached. A tabernacle was erected in about the center of the church edifice, in which the Blessed Sacrament was kept in a transparent vessel incased in an open-work metal cover. To this day, in some European churches, we see these vessels.