

## THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

Genesis 4. 18-20  
1 Corinthians 11. 23-26  
John 6. 51-58

If the Eucharist matters to us, then today matters. If the Eucharist is this gift beyond price of 'God's presence and his very self'; if it is at the heart of celebrating God's love; if our Gospel speaks the truth when it says 'whoever eats of this bread will live for ever', then Corpus Christi is a most precious day.

Corpus Christi is not only a day to talk about the Eucharist, but to offer it. We meet, as we always do, as the people of God at the altar of God; the body of Christ receiving the body and blood of Christ: holy things for the holy common people of God. Today is not different from any other day of the year: the Eucharist is given to us as we show forth the Lord's death until he comes. Today, as every day, we do what others have done for centuries before us and will do long after we are gone. It is not our Eucharist, and it is not the Church's Eucharist. It is God's Eucharist, God's feast, God's gift to his world. Here at the altar, we enter into the everlasting movement of his love towards us and to all creation. And we in turn are part of creation's response of gratitude that we are loved like this. Indeed, thankfulness is what the word *Eucharist* means.

At Corpus Christi, we are more conscious of this than at other times. Our awareness of what we are participating in is heightened; our feeling for the eternal dimension of the Eucharist is made more explicit. We are doing what we always do with bread and wine, because it is what Jesus commanded us to do. But at Corpus Christi there is special meaning as the sacrifice of God's Son is made present in our midst. We know that in this sacrament we touch a presence that is both universal and particular. In the crucified and risen Christ shown to us in this life-changing way, we touch what belongs to all of time and every place. In ordinary bread and wine

transformed and given back to us in a new way, we get a glimpse of the ultimate renewal of creation, when God's purposes will be made complete (and that includes being made complete in us).

Corpus Christi affirms the catholic (i.e. universal) instinct that is in every Christian, and the most profound words we can ever utter are the words 'thank you'. Once we grasp this, we see life in a new way, in a Eucharistic way. The transformation of broken bread and poured out wine into heavenly food and drink becomes a symbol of renewed attitudes within us. G.K. Chesterton put it like this.

*You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the play and the opera, and grace before the concert and the pantomime, and grace before I open the book, and grace before sketching and painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing, and grace before I dip pen in the ink.*

And, I want to add, before I face the poor, the deprived, the neglected, my suffering brother or sister in whom the image of Christ is most to be honoured. I am saying that the Eucharistic food with which we are nourished changes me into someone capable of forgetting my own needs for a moment in order to find a spark of generosity that will feed and nourish those who cry out for their daily bread. The Eucharist encourages me to be Christ towards everyone, especially those most in need. Bishop Frank Weston of Zanzibar, who spoke at an Anglo-Catholic Congress 90 years ago, said:

*You have got your Mass, you have got your Altar, you have begun to get your Tabernacle. Now go out into the highways and hedges, where not even the Bishops will try to hinder you. Go out and look for Jesus in the ragged, in the naked, in the oppressed and sweated, in those who have lost hope, in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus. And when you see him, gird yourselves with his towel and try to wash their feet.*

Corpus Christi has as its focus not only how God feeds us, but how we feed others in the name of the One who speaks of himself as the Living Bread. Alan Ecclestone said: 'What matters for praying is what we do next.' What we do next; what we do when we have been nourished at this altar and cross the St Stephen's threshold to go back to our homes and to our ordinary days; that is the test of how far this Eucharistic way is becoming a habit of the heart. What we do next is the test of how far we are being nourished by this living bread so that it becomes not only bread for ourselves, but bread for our neighbour. This is what it means truly to become the body of Christ in the world, to become *Corpus Christi*.

Amen.