

Fr James' homily for Corpus Christi 2020

First Reading: Deuteronomy 8: 2-16
Second Reading: First Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians 10: 16-17
Gospel: John 6: 51-58



Today's Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, *Corpus Christi*, should be a joyous day - and indeed it will be - but also I can't help feeling anxious and sad. Normally this day we would make our little procession of worship on the streets, for the glory of God and with the curiosity and sometimes heckling of onlookers. It is always a great act of witness to our faith and the truth of Jesus present in the Sacred Host.

This year, of course, we can't do this, or at least can't do it and be responsible to the common good. That's a cause of sadness. At the same time, I have been reading Bishop Barron's comments on a recent survey in America that showed that as many as 70% of American "Catholics" currently don't believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament!! I wonder what the result would be here, but experience of a sometimes casual or uncaring attitude to this central truth of the faith means that I would not be surprised if the situation were much the same.

Something big has gone off the rails, not suddenly but over a period of time, and that is the cause of huge anxiety. Anything we try to build whilst that situation persists will be like trying to build a house on no foundations. I think it likely that the "lockdown" experience will show this weakness up as time moves on, as we are separated from the reality of the sacraments. It will show up where buildings have no foundations.

In the first reading today Moses asks the people to remember. To remember the faithfulness of God and in that to remember the meaning of the "bread from heaven", the Manna with which God fed them in the desert. Manna is an odd word meaning something like "what the heck is this stuff?" or maybe "I-can't-believe-it's-not-a-meat-feast" to be a bit more flippant. In that daily miracle of bread from heaven was shown the whole character of God's purpose of redemption through that testing time.

Maybe you can see where this is going. This scripture is placed next to the wonderful Gospel from John Chapter 6, in itself a meditation on our Eucharistic faith, a meditation on the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Underlining and teaching this truth has been vital from day one of the life of the Church, these "last days." "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven" says the Lord.

So the great clue to a joyful day today is to see the mystery of the Eucharist, of what happens at Mass to which each of us in lockdown is joined by the prayers of our

hearts, of the wonder of the Blessed Sacrament and the Tabernacle in church, through the lens of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the Manna in the desert.

All through the centuries of the Catholic tradition this has been seen as an allegory, one story that points to another. Egypt represents all that holds us captive - our sins, our addictions and our self-obsession. To cut a long story short, escape comes through God's grace and they come a promised land, a fullness of being. But in the middle, in the years in the wilderness, things are not easy. That, friends, is where we are in this world, in these biblical "last days." How do we experience this time? It is always a trial (but that's not the same thing as saying it is some sort of test set for us to fail.) It is a trial of our faith in God's faithfulness. The temptation, just as for Israel in the desert, is always to go back to the sin and addiction and self-obsession.

What do they need? What sustains any journey? They need food. They need what Jesus describes in the Gospel today. They need the bread for eternal life, which is Jesus himself. The key to every trial. The meaning of eternal life. (Not like some vampire horror story of endlessly prolonged existence, but eternal life - the life of God beyond space and time). This is what redeems and transforms all trials. Another temptation too is to take the bread for granted, as a right, as something casual. The Exodus story shows that happening more than once!

So let us today bow down in wonder before the Blessed Sacrament. Today we have to do this in a spiritual visit in our own homes and hearts. ***Next week we can God willing do so in our own churches, and in other churches.*** Let us ponder in quiet the awesome truth of Jesus present; of the Sacrament of Holy Communion; of the Sacrament of Reconciliation that is bound to it. (Perhaps if that link wasn't obvious before, we can make it anew today so that we can receive Holy Communion worthily). Let us ponder in our prayers why Jesus sought to emphasise this truth so much. For the point is as much about the need of changing and converting ourselves as it is about changing the reality of bread and wine into his Most Sacred Body and Blood. There's the foundation on which any building can be built.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Corpus Christi Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch.

- Read the Catechism, paragraphs [2828 - 2837](#), about the meaning of our translation of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." When we read on the surface, it can seem very matter of fact. But "daily bread" translates a word like "Manna" that is very difficult to translate and means something like "bread beyond what we apprehend" or "bread for the endless day of God."