

Fr James' homily for Corpus Christi 2021



First Reading: Exodus 24:3-8
Second Reading: The Letter to the Hebrews 9:11-15
Gospel: Mark 14:12-26

We tend to call this lovely feast “Corpus Christi”, focusing on the Sacred Host, the Body of Christ, for very practical reasons, as the host is so easily displayed for adoration and carried in procession. But, today remember is the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, of his whole sacrifice. It should of course be a feast we keep on Thursday past, as an echo of Holy Thursday and the Last Supper, but again, Sunday our bishops have decided, is more practical...and it that leads more souls to conversion of heart and life, all to the good.

Let us think a little today about the Blood of Christ, therefore. We should, as in our diocese our wonderful cathedral is dedicated to the Precious Blood of Jesus. Devotions to the Precious Blood you may find in many prayer books and profitably use.

Today's scriptures are full of blood! This is an experience we are not so familiar with, except for those of you who may have been brought up in rural and farming communities. It was a great shock to my system when I was years ago in rural Romania and was introduced to George. George was a pig...and because there were guests coming (i.e. us), George that day was going to be butchered for dinner.

The ancient world was filled with animal sacrifice. The religion of Israel was full of it. Blood was regarded as the essence of life. So we read that when Moses has presented the covenant to the people that God would make with them, it must be sealed with a sacrifice. In sprinkling blood over them, God is showing his desire to share his life with his people... (*perhaps you see where we are headed with this!*)

The Letter to the Hebrews closely reflects the life of the Temple in Jerusalem. It has been said that you could smell the Temple long before you saw it, because of the offering of animal sacrifice. At the heart of this was the annual Day of Atonement (still of course part of the Jewish observance, only without the Temple and the sacrifice). Each year the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and, after sacrifice, once again emerged to sprinkle blood on the people, for the forgiveness of sins. God's lifeblood, indeed, poured out on his people. In the Letter to the Hebrews Christ is shown to be the definitive High Priest who, once and for all, makes the sacrifice for the sins of the people. The veil of the Temple, remember, was ripped in two at the death of Jesus...as though it would not be needed again.

All of this is the background to our Gospel, in which St Mark recounts the Last Supper. Here Christ anticipates what will happen upon the Cross the next day. Indeed, at the end of the Gospel they worship in psalms and the stage is set for Christ's offering of his Precious Blood.

This Feast of Corpus Christi is, in part, meant to bring us to an understanding of what happens when we celebrate Mass and participate in it. An ordained priest wears symbolic vestments that are the robes of the priest of the Temple. He acts in the person of the one High Priest, Jesus on the Day of Atonement. He lifts up the chalice, and in this all the Faithful raise to the Father the sacrifice, the blood of the Son. This is what Mass is for - to bring all the world to be sprinkled with the blood of Christ. If Mass was just a jolly time to remember what a great guy Jesus was, well, so what? Who needs that? Rather we come into the living presence of God's desire to save his people, and we all called to take our place in that work and to grow in our own holiness. Please! Give me a bit of that! How awesome is the faith we profess? Alleluia!

Amen.

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