

20th Sunday (B)

19th August 2018

'Preparing spiritually for the Congress'

Prov 9: Wisdom feeds her people

Ps 33: *Taste and see that the Lord is good*

Eph 5: *always and everywhere give thanks to God the Father through Jesus*

Jn 6: 51–58: *He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me*

In 3 weeks' time, 10,000 Catholics — including 7 of our parishioners and me — will be gathered in Liverpool for the National Eucharistic Congress. This is the first time that our country has arranged a Eucharistic Congress since the one at the start of the 20th c.:1908, Edwardian London! Back then, the Government of the day at the last minute refused permission for a Blessed Sacrament Procession, deeming that it contravened the provisions of the Catholic Emancipation Act which had given more freedoms to Catholics in the 19th c after 300yrs of persecution. Clearly it was not happy for Catholics then to express their faith in Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist. The newspapers of the day were quite disapproving of the Government's banning of the Blessed Sacrament Procession, and naturally the Catholic faithful were extremely disappointed. I am glad to say that, this year, in our Liverpool Congress, there will be a huge Eucharistic Procession, with all the joy that that brings

as we process in devotion to Jesus. A couple of months ago, when the Cardinal re-dedicated Corpus Christi Church in London they had a beautiful procession in and around Covent Garden. It's a wonderful and public way to show that we follow in Christ's footsteps!

The Congress next month is arranged not just for those who can attend, but for all the country's Catholics, to allow them in union with those at the Congress to renew their love for, and faith in, the Sacrament of Christ's body & blood. Our Lord's words through the past weeks' Gospel passages from Jn 6 are clear, and direct. His teaching makes it perfectly plain that He wished to leave His Church this wonderful Sacrament of His real Presence. Several times, in today's Gospel passage, in different ways, Our Lord repeats: "Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever, and the bread that I shall eat is my flesh for the life of the world." There are no ways to understand these words other than the way in which, as Catholics, we have always understood them. That Our Blessed Lord really did wish to give us His very presence — His living, divine, presence —

as an abiding memorial of Himself. This He does through the surprisingly simple elements of bread and wine — the need only for flour and water, and grape juice, elements that pretty much every society can access, even if quite poor and undeveloped. Through these elements, and with the sacred rites of consecration in the Mass — Jesus’s very own words at the Last Supper — we receive into our midst, in each and every generation, the blessed presence of Jesus, Son of God and Saviour of the world.

We cannot, and should not, ever cease to be amazed at this miracle and sacrament. We should never grow tired of this incredible humility of Jesus, by which He makes Himself so available to us, His people. He wishes so much to give us a taste of His life: He wishes to feed us with Himself, His risen flesh, such that we can draw from Him the eternal life of the Resurrection. When Our Blessed Lord comes to us in the Holy Eucharist, He isn’t feeding us principally for this life, just for a prolongation of earthly existence, but with a view to the life to come. This is why it is so special to receive Our Lord devoutly throughout one’s

life by keeping the Lord’s Day holy each and every week at Mass. But also, even when one is no longer able to get to Mass because of incapacity or illness, one should request to receive Holy Communion at home or in hospital; in this way to be able to continue perfectly ‘in communion’ with Jesus Christ. It has been a bit unusual this year, but almost all the funerals I have done in 2018 have been of parishioners who lived their love of the Mass and Holy Communion to the very end. Their having received the “bread of life” — Jesus, the risen one, source of eternal life — to their very last days brings with it a far greater hope of their being truly ready for life with Jesus in heaven.

Let’s not forget, it’s in this great Sacrament that here on earth we come closest of all to the living God — closer than in any other possible way this side of heaven. *“If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life in you; anyone who does eat My flesh and drink My blood has eternal life, and I shall raise Him up on the last day.”*

Jesus, Sacrament of Life, come to me always!