

Corpus Christi (C)

23rd June 2019

'Our Lord feeds His people'

Gen 14: 'the bread and wine offered by your priest, Melchizedek'

Ps 109: *a priest like Melchizedek of old*

1Cor 11: *This is what I received from the Lord ...* Lk 9: 11–17: feeding of the 5000

This beautiful feast of *Corpus Christi* — the next in the cycle of feasts that follow on from Easter — allows us to celebrate in a particular way the greatest of all the sacramental gifts of Christ to His people, the Holy Eucharist. Whilst of course Baptism is the *gateway* to the sacraments — we enter into life in Christ through the waters of that first sacrament — yet it is the Sacrament of the Eucharist that is the *pinnacle* of the Sacraments, the high-point of initiation of the Christian into life in the Lord. Christian initiation consists of all three first sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and the holy Eucharist. To be able to receive Our Blessed Lord in the gift of Himself given first at the Last Supper, is a blessed privilege indeed, and a moment, whenever we come to Holy Communion, to savour and to humbly offer thanksgiving for.

As we see through the OT, and then again the NT, God repeatedly makes this gesture of feeding His people.

The most obvious sign of this in the OT is the miraculous 'bread from heaven' that fed the people of Israel in the years in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. But there are other occasions, for example when Elijah is roused and fed, during the famine, so as to allow him to resume his ministry as prophet. God cares for His people, and an expression of this in His feeding them, sustaining them, is not uncommon.

So, when Jesus feeds the 5,000 by Lake Galilee, as we heard there in the Gospel passage from Luke today, it is a great sign that God is moving amongst His people. And it makes them think, is this the Messiah? Is this the definitive acting of God in Israel? John's Gospel makes this even clearer, as the people follow up the Feeding of the 5,000 with this direct question to Jesus: "*What sign will You give to show that we should believe in You? What work will You do? Our fathers had manna to eat in the desert ...*" It is clear that they believe that He will do greater things than merely feed them with bread and fish, howsoever miraculous that already is!

And of course, they are right. Jesus fully intends to work a far, far greater miracle for them in due course: the miracle of the Eucharist. The Feeding of the 5,000 is just a sign of that, another sign, following on from all the evidence in the OT that God will nourish His people by Himself. All these signs, given to Israel, point to one thing: to the greatest way in which God could feed us, namely, with His very own life, His own self, His flesh and blood. Everything in the compassion of God for humanity, everything in the desire of God to be close to His believing people, is leading to this one, sublime Gift, the Sacrament of Sacraments — the Eucharist.

This is why we Catholics make such a big deal of Mass. It's why the Church teaches us unceasingly that: (i) we must come to Mass weekly, Sunday by Sunday, and on the holy days; that we must prepare well for Mass, and give thanksgiving too afterwards; (ii) that we must respect the Mass to the greatest degree, genuflecting to the Lord in the Tabernacle when we come and go from church, or cross in front of the altar; (iii) that we must examine our hearts and if we are conscious of grave sin to abstain from Holy Communion until we have made our

Confession; (iv) that we should make a practice of coming in to the church as often as we can, when passing, in order to pray quietly to Jesus here truly present; (v) that we would do well to use the times of Adoration in order to grow in His love, find peace in our troubled lives, and simply adore Jesus for being Who He Is, the Son of God made flesh, the flesh made food for our souls in the Eucharist.

So: as we celebrate this glorious feast of *Corpus Christi*, 'the Body of Christ,' we should also keep in prayer as a parish the children first beginning to receive Jesus in Holy Communion at this time, and to ask the Lord that they and their families always grow to love Him deeply in the Holy Mass. But the other thing we need to do, as an expression of this Catholic faith of ours in the adorable presence of Our Saviour in this Sacrament is to commit ourselves to assisting watch and pray at the parish's '40 Hrs' Adoration in two weekends' time. July 5th–7th, this year, is our 3-day prolonged period of special prayer before Jesus exposed on the altar, and I appeal to you, each, to give up just 30 mins, half an hour, at some point that weekend, to show that you love the Lord, that you are grateful for His sacrifice that saved you, and that you desire ever closer a union with Him, as He does with you.