

# Worship at Home: Celebrating Corpus Christi

## The First Sunday after Trinity

### 6th June 2021

#### HOMILY

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Saint Paul writes, as we have heard, to the church in Corinth:

*“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”*

Scarce have any words in Christian history, save perhaps the prayer that Jesus taught us, been so oft repeated in worship, and few are held in such reverence. All across the world today, people of every race and background will gather, as once the disciples did on the night before he died to demonstrate with their liturgy and their worship that food is the most important thing. This food, which addresses both our material need for nourishment, and the yearning of our souls for gladness, invites us from every place from which we're drawn to receive in our hands the tokens of Christ's passion, and the pledge of the Father's love for each of us through these signs of 'love in its most radical form'.

In the dark pandemic months, many of us were prevented from sharing this food. All kinds of things ameliorated that grief and distress, as communities found patterns of sustaining their bonds during times of loss and suffering. We did what we could to spiritually unite with Christ and with the church, militant and triumphant, despite the most exceptional of circumstances. With creativity has come a willingness to do that which is not normal. Aided by the tools of mass communication, the inability to gather, even very simply, in the places set aside for worship meant the taking of everyday surfaces in offices, dining rooms, and kitchens to become for a time the place where the veil 'twixt heaven and earth is drawn momentarily thin'. A great effort to bring worship to a church, when we are much more used to the church coming to worship, belies the simpler ways in which this worship was real and authentic, even when it was tough and compromising.

Parishioners dropping things at my home at times of self-isolation, or simply because they were sharing acts of kindness, knew that close to the door was the place that their worship was temporarily grounded, the body of Christ broken and the blood of Christ poured out. In places where the sacrament is reserved, the faithful paused by the exterior walls because they knew what they hungered for was there.

“Whomever eats of this bread shall live forever”, says the Lord, as the Eucharistic presence says to us – again and again – that God so loved the world. This Corpus Christi, as with all of the times we have celebrated this feast over the last 15 months, we have to stretch our definitions a little further: stretching what it means to make our Communion when for most we're only receiving in one kind or through a form of words that expresses our intention; stretching what it means to spiritually receive the pledge of life eternal, even though at times we cannot hold it; stretching in faith to remain within the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, though we cannot eat this bread and drink this cup; stretching to maintain something of our common life, even while we are being socially distant.

But we are never bystanders. As this mystery of faith unfolds, and the material creatures of bread and wine are taken, we start to see that 'love in its most radical form', foretold in the love of Christ at supper and the love of Christ at Calvary, has transformed the destiny of things, pointing them to the heavens. And all this starts long before the week of Jesus' passion, as the Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov explains:

*The destiny of water he says is to participate in the mystery of the Epiphany, the destiny of the earth is to receive the body of the Lord...the destiny of stone is to end as the sealed tomb. Olive oil...[finds] fulfilment as conductors of grace to regenerated [men and women]; the wheat and the vine culminate in the Eucharistic cup. Everything refers to the incarnation and everything leads to the Lord.*

Of these things, Christ has made a new creation by the shedding of his blood, and by holy invitation to 'do this in remembrance of me' intends that we should become what we eat when we share the body of Christ, for this is the new destiny of humankind. If only we knew what we were doing. If only we knew what an incredible effect this simple food would have upon our lives. If only we knew, when trustingly we took and ate as he invites to do (in all our unloveliness) that we were becoming so completely his. How indebted we are to those who called to Jesus, saying 'Sir, give us this bread always' that we might 'feed on him in our hearts, by faith with thanksgiving.'

Just over three hundred years ago, a collection of meditations written by the devotional writer Susannah Hopton were published. In her prayer 'A thanksgiving at home after the Holy Communion', she draws on scripture and the words of the prayer book liturgy as she reflects on the urge to thanksgiving when she is far from the place of worship and returned to her home:

*'Blessed art thou, O Lord God... who has now vouchsafed to feed me with the bread of life, and has given me to drink the Cup of Eternity...thereby assuring my Soul of thy favour and goodness towards me. What shall I render unto the Lord for all that he hath done unto me, I will take the cup of Salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord. Praise thou the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and Riches, and Wisdom, and Strength, and Honour, and Glory, and Blessing.'*

If we see in the wheat and the vine of the eucharist, that they have are made new, and have led us to the Lord because they have found new destiny in Christ, may we in spiritually uniting ourselves by receiving them know, in our inmost being, that we have also been made new. As Saint Paul writes elsewhere: 'The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'

Draw near in faith. Let us together receive the pledge of that love.