

Homily Corpus Christi 2022

I've got to know Al in the last couple of years. I first met him whilst he was sitting praying at the Lourdes Grotto at Holy Redeemer Church. Al would also come to Adoration of The Blessed Sacrament on a Monday without fail. He would sit there before The Holy Eucharist in silent prayer. So what's so special about that you might ask? Well, if I tell you that Al is a Northern Irish Protestant then you will appreciate my admiration of the man.

Today we celebrate the Feast of The Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi. I suppose it's The Feast of The Blessed Sacrament and of The Eucharist. Today's Gospel reminds us of the feeding of The Jewish People with manna in the desert. Indeed, both the OT passage and Luke's account of The Feeding of the 5000 prefigure The Institution of The Eucharist, Our Lord's Body and Blood poured out for each and every one of us, to sustain us on our earthly pilgrimage. It is interesting to note that Jesus, when he feeds the 5000, uses the exact words as he does at The Last Supper:

'...he raised his eyes to heaven, said the blessing, broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute amongst the crowd...' (Luke 9:11-17). Clearly St Luke meant the passage as a Eucharistic Discourse.

Today's Second Reading is probably the earliest written account of The Last Supper and the Institution of The Eucharist. St Paul writes:

'This is what I received from The Lord, and in turn passed on to you: that on the same night he was betrayed the Lord Jesus took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it, and he said, 'This is my body which is for you; do this as a memorial of me.' In the same way he took the cup after supper and said, 'This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.' Until the Lord comes, therefore every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death and resurrection'.

St Paul deliberately uses the word 'memorial' from the Biblical Greek Word 'anamnesis' to emphasise that through The Sacred Liturgy we do not simply remember or commemorate Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection every time we come to Mass. We are therefore truly present, through signs and symbols, at the salvific act of Christ as he suffers and dies for our sins and in the Resurrection overcome the final enemy, death.

In the First Reading from Genesis the High Priest, Melchizedek at the time of Abraham also prefigures Christ as he, in the words from Genesis, 'brought bread and wine and pronounced a blessing over it'. So from the very beginning of the historical account of salvation history (Genesis 12 onwards) 'bread and wine' are seen as signs of God's saving power (Genesis 14: 18-20).

So from the beginning is salvation history, to the feeding of The Chosen People in the Sinai Desert, to The Feeding of the 5000, God used bread and wine as symbols of our redemption. The culmination of God's saving work and the apex of our salvation sees Jesus use bread and wine in The Eucharistic Meal which we relive every time we celebrate Mass.

I think Al's example of reverence and awe before the Blessed Sacrament is a great example to us Catholics who may at times take Our Lord's presence in the Eucharist far too lightly.