

## **Fr James Bishop SSC Homily for Corpus Christi - 2018**

O Sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of our eternal glory is bestowed upon us.

I first heard this well known cry of faith from the mind and pen of the great St Thomas Aquinas at a hospital bed in the RMH about 46 years ago. I was with that truly saintly priest the late Fr Michael King, loved former Abbot of Camperdown. He was then assistant priest at St Peter's Eastern Hill and I was there on a pastoral placement. Fr was giving Holy Communion to a patient in the hospital. These lovely words of St Thomas made a powerful impact upon me then and I say them every time I receive Holy Communion.

Every phrase of the cry has its importance and its message.

*O Sacred Banquet.* The Holy Mass and receiving Holy Communion is a participation in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb spoken of in the Book of Revelation. It is a banquet. The food is like no other for it is the Lord himself who is both the provider of the banquet and the very food itself. A banquet is an occasion of rejoicing and celebration. This phrase should remind us that every mass should be an occasion of joyful celebration. It is this thought that underpins virtually all the beautiful customs we associate with the celebration of Mass. Beautiful vestments, lights, incense, ceremonial actions, glorious singing all done in a beautiful setting. A wedding feast comes to mind as a good simile for the mass. At a wedding everyone is well dressed, the room is beautifully prepared, the food and wine is the best available. There is music and often dancing all for the sake of the bride and groom. Jesus Christ is the groom here and we – the church - are the bride. A very beautiful thought indeed.

*O Sacred Banquet in which Christ is received.* We can never know how it is that Jesus Christ makes himself present in this wonderful sacrament but he most certainly does just that – because he said he would do so. God can be trusted to do as he says he will. All the explanations of how that may be can be helpful but all of them fall short as they must. We cannot reduce something as wonderful as the presence of Jesus in this Sacrament to a mere formula. My senses tell me that I receive bread

and wine at Holy Communion. My heart and my faith tell me beyond all doubt that I receive Jesus Christ. As St Thomas Aquinas says again, faith befriends our senses to make what is interior perfectly clear. Christ is most certainly received – body, soul and divinity.

*O Sacred Banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed.*

The Holy Mass is most certainly not a re-crucifixion of our Lord but it most certainly is a participation in the eternal offering that our Lord makes of his sacrifice upon the cross to the Father on our behalf and on the behalf of the whole of creation. Our own prayer of Oblation puts this truth as well as any Eucharistic prayer in any part of the church anywhere when it says: *Wherefore, O Lord and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants, having in remembrance the precious death and passion of thy dear Son, his mighty Resurrection and glorious Ascension, according to his holy institution, do celebrate, and set forth before thy Divine Majesty with these thy holy gifts, the memorial which he hath willed us to make.* The memorial that we make at every Mass is the memorial of the saving passion and death of Our Lord upon the cross and his mighty resurrection and ascension. We are, if you like, truly at the foot of the cross and at the tomb where his broken, lifeless body was placed. It is that body, bloodied and broken for us, that is present in the Holy Gifts of the bread and wine of the Altar which have become in very truth Our Lord's most sacred body and blood.

*O Sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace.* We so readily forget that the sacraments of our faith are given to us so that we may receive real and effective tokens of God's love. In Holy Communion we receive Our Lord's body and blood because he is there to help us in our journey through life with his saving grace - his love, his help, his friendship, if you like. We first received that grace at our baptism, we receive it at our confirmation, when we make our confession, at our marriage ceremonies, when we are sick and are anointed, at an ordination but above all we can receive, daily, for some, God's grace in Holy Communion. It is not given, for goodness, sake, just so we can feel a momentary warm inner glow

of religious pleasure. That would be extremely self indulgent. Grace is given in Holy Communion so that we may have God's help in our Christian living and indeed in all of our daily life.

*O Sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of our eternal glory is bestowed upon us.*

A pledge of our eternal glory is bestowed upon us. Eternal life has had a bad press for most of my life in the church, for some reason. Let us never forget that the fundamental message of Christianity is that Christ is Risen and that we too can share in his resurrection life by placing our faith, hope and trust in his saving death on the cross. But what will that resurrection life be like? We keep on asking ourselves. The sceptics and doubters falter when resurrection is spoken of because it is so difficult to even begin to visualise. St Paul is our greatest help in this regard. He says that our resurrection life will be like comparing a full grown plant with the seed it came from. If you didn't know the plant came from the seed you'd never guess it, they are so completely different. The magnitude of one (the seed) is so small, fragile and insignificant. The other (the plant) is by comparison so large, so strong, so resilient, so beautiful, so real! My grandfather used to say, we can never begin to understand in this life, the glory that awaits those who hope in the Lord Jesus.

All our childish talk of clouds, angels playing harps, games of golf or endless music festivals etc all fall incredibly short of the glory of the resurrection. However, the resurrection is the reality upon which our faith is built. The Holy Communion is our foretaste in this life of that amazing transformation that awaits us. Our risen Lord gives himself to us in Holy Communion to remind us that this life is not all that there is. Far, far from it.

Dear People, let your hearts and souls be filled with these words of St Thomas Aquinas today, especially, but every day: *O Sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of our eternal glory is bestowed upon us.*