

Sermon Feast of Corpus Christi Year C 2022

The important story from the gospel of Luke placed before us today for this feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, reminds us of a key biblical truth: God, of his graciousness, provides for his people. We recall the key story from Exodus of the Israelites, who despite grumbling and complaining, are fed forty years in the desert with manna, the bread from heaven. We look to the great promise of the land flowing with milk and honey. We remember the prophet Elijah who blesses the poor widow and her child, and assures them that their supplies of flour and oil will never be diminished. We recall Elisha who feeds 100 people with 20 loaves. And, in a story told uniquely by all four gospels - and as we hear today - of our Lord who miraculously feeds the crowds with humble offerings of bread and fish. The people who gather about Jesus are hungry, and he feeds them. God feeds his hungry people.

This generous, abundant, provision of the God of grace, love and mercy reveals to us a simple but essential point we want to make about the Christian God: God is *for* us. God cares for his people. He loves them. He desires the best for them. He wants to provide for them. He wants them to know goodness, truth and life. *God is for us!* And this is as distinct to other things we might say about the divine: that God is cruel and capricious, or absent and remote, or disengaged and alien to us and our experiences. All those ideas about God have been proposed and debated. But that is *not* the God of Scripture and not the God of Jesus Christ. In Jesus we see how the Incarnate God is not only for us, but that in fact he is *with us*: Emmanuel. And God with us to such an extent – present to us to such an extent – that he feeds us.

In the gospel account placed before us today, we hear of Jesus who takes, blesses, breaks, and gives the bread. This of course intentionally echoes the gospel account of the last supper and the institution of the eucharist. Christ feeds his people not only in a miraculous multiplication of bread. Christ feeds us in the giving of his very self! *Take eat, this is my body. Drink, this is my blood.* Now, a fundamental point that cannot be stressed enough is that as faithful believers we take Christ at his word. If what he feeds us with is his own body, *then that is what it is!* He does not say this is a symbol of my body. Nor, this is my spiritual body (whatever that is!). And not a memorial of my body. No. *This is my body. This is my blood.* This very point is restated in John 6. *I am the bread of life... Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.*

Christ feeds us *because* he is for us. He feeds us of himself because he desires to remain with us. In the lowly bread of the Eucharist is found the sign and guarantee of his abiding presence. He gives us of himself because he wants to remain close to us. And can there be anything closer, more intimate, than to take him to ourselves as food, the living bread from heaven, that he himself gives?

Christ in the lowly form of bread reminds of that key Christian truth: the Incarnate One *remains* present to us. The God who is for us and with us walks among us still. The procession at the end of mass today is a unique aspect of our worship. And it is one that is meant to reinforce this truth for us. It is a joyful procession. A triumphant procession. It recalls how God in Christ took human flesh and shared our common human life, and how, at his command and by his power in the form of bread and wine, he continues to be present among us. The procession of the Blessed Sacrament is not a vain show of pomp – misguided Anglo-Catholic devotion on steroids – but a mark of honour to the Lord who remains true to his word. We do not do all this simply because we like to dress up and parade around. We do it because we believe the One who says, *this is my body, this is my blood* is here!

Now, the Mystery of the Trinity we celebrated last week is intimately bound to our celebration today. Last week I noted that as we look at the record of scripture, we see how God *progressively* reveals himself. And the reason for this progression is simply that God in God's very being is love. His purpose and motive for revealing himself to humankind is love. And love's aim is always greater intimacy, deeper union with the beloved. The stages of God's self-disclosure are stages of increasing intimacy. By the Father's will and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Incarnate Son comes to dwell in us, as he gives of himself, as he feeds of himself.

Progression, indeed *procession*, are part of God's very life. Procession is a word that belongs to the way we speak about God. Indeed, the Christian doctrine of God is a doctrine of processions: the Son proceeds from the Father, as does the Spirit. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The reality of God is a reality of processions, of going out from oneself, of self-giving to another, a self-giving of love that makes the other what it is, which defines its life.

This self-giving God gives himself to us in the physicality of the Incarnation. In the miracle of the Eucharist, we enact that self-giving. By it, we are drawn into the perfect offering of the Son to the Father. And this itself is an action, a motion, a procession, a going forth of love from one to another. The reason for this, of course, is that a procession is not simply a ritual of praise and worship, *it is a witness to the gospel we proclaim*. God with us, Jesus Christ, who comes among us as the food and drink which gives us life, is something that we ought to be shouting from the rooftops! At the very least something we are compelled to share! We receive Christ, here at this altar, in part to go out, to proceed forth, to carry him and his saving gospel with us into the world.

The ceremony, the splendour, the ritual that surrounds our procession - and the rest of our celebration today - is not just a case of high church extravagance. The candles, the flowers, the stirring music, the bells, the canopy, the incense, the procession all combine to make one point and one point only: *he is here!* These things the church has given us as a means to show honour to the Lord Christ truly present among us. And all combine to draw our eyes and our hearts up, to look upon him. Look! *Behold! Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.*

Now, so often we can only see our problems, our limitations. So often we are stuck in introspection. We can only look inward and so get lost on a path of hopelessness and despair. But the gospel account today tells us that from the poor offering of five loaves and two fish the crowds eat their fill and the hungry are fed. And this abundant provision despite the initial protests of the disciples! *Send the people away*, they said to Jesus. *We have nothing, except this small offering, this small gift*. Despite the lack the disciples allege, there are twelve baskets left over! We must not respond to the hunger – the profound hunger, the devastating spiritual hunger – in our world by saying we do not have anything to share! The world around us – if you have not yet woken up to the fact – is marked by a new religion of self-worship, hedonism, and materialism. But oftentimes we second guess ourselves. In the face of so much evil and depravity, we wonder, what on earth can we possibly offer?

But we have the most sublime gift we could ever hope for or imagine in the Eucharist! And in this sublime gift, Christ continues to show up, again and again, week after week, day after day! God is with us. God is for us. And today we are reminded that he walks amongst us still, present among us to feed our hungry souls. And we must proceed forth to bear this good news. Amen.