

Corpus Christi in Lockdown

adapted from a meditation by Fr Andrew Hutchinson

From medieval times the feast of Corpus Christi - the Body of Christ - has been celebrated with great panache. Often there are colourful processions through the streets carrying the Blessed Sacrament – the Sacred Bread of the Eucharist – as a reminder of Christ journeying with His people and His continual presence with us.

The key word in our appreciation of the sacrament of the Eucharist is remembrance. But the word used by Jesus and repeated by Saint Paul means rather more than “evoking a memory” as we might do by looking at the photograph of a loved one. Both the Greek word ἀνάμνησις / *anamnesis* used in the New Testament, and the equivalent Hebrew term זִכְרוֹן / *zikkaron* used in connection with the Jewish Passover, mean more than that. They speak of taking an event from the past and making it dynamic and effective now.

When we as Christians gather to celebrate Holy Communion, we bring an event that happened two thousand years ago – the death of Jesus on the cross – into our present-day experience. The salvation won for us by Jesus Christ becomes part of our own faith experience in a dynamic way.

For many of us the celebration of the Eucharist is the bedrock of our faith. Being part of virtual celebrations during lockdown has enabled our communities to understand this sacrament better, and has served wonderfully to bring us together. However, all online attempts can be no substitute for the real thing.

Many of us are missing congregational worship, community life, the singing of hymns and songs and the leading of God’s praise with choirs. As a priest I am missing terribly the joy of breaking bread and sharing wine in communion with my community, since the lack of celebrating Mass has contributed to a feeling of exile which we are all experiencing at the moment.

The celebration of the Eucharist is something we do together, having heard the Scriptures together and prayed together. So we are currently prevented (quite understandably) from expressing in sign and sacrament what it means to be Christ’s people sharing one bread and one cup.

After this period of lockdown and abstinence from the Eucharist I shall be really looking forward to our gatherings and the opportunity to cherish this gift more fervently.

I’ll close with some verses from the hymn written by Stuart Townend which capture the meaning of Christ’s love in the Eucharist :

How deep the Father's love for us;
How vast beyond all measure,
That He would give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure!
How great the pain of searing loss:
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.

I will not boast in anything:
No gifts, no power, no wisdom/
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer.
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom.