

Corpus Christi (C)

19th June 2022

'Our Lord feeds His people'

Gen 14: 'the bread and wine offered by your priest, Melchizedek'

Ps 109: *a priest like Melchizedek of old*

1Cor 11: *This is what I received from the Lord* ... Lk 9: 11–17: feeding of the 5000

This beautiful feast of *Corpus Christi* — the next in the cycle of feasts that follow on from Eastertide — allows us to celebrate in a particular way the greatest of all the sacramental gifts of Christ to His people, the Holy Eucharist. Whilst of course Baptism is the *gateway* to the sacraments — we enter into life in Christ through the waters of that first sacrament — yet it is the Sacrament of the Eucharist that is the *pinnacle* of the Sacraments, the high-point of initiation of the Christian into life in the Lord. Christian initiation consists of all three *first* sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and the holy Eucharist. Although many of us will have received these sacraments in a spaced-out way, spread over many years — probably in the order, Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation — yet the logical order is the order in which a new adult Christian receives them, at the Easter Vigil: Baptism, ... Confirmation a few mins later ...then First

Holy Communion at the end of that Easter Vigil Mass ... because the Eucharist is the *high-point*, the 'Sacrament of Sacraments.' To be able to receive Our Blessed Lord in the gift of Himself given first at the Last Supper, is a blessed privilege indeed, and a moment, whenever we come to Holy Communion, to savour and to humbly offer thanksgiving for.

As we see through various episodes in the OT, and then again the NT, God repeatedly makes this gesture of feeding His people. The most obvious sign of this in the OT is the miraculous 'bread from heaven,' manna, the basic foodstuff that fed the people of Israel in the years in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. But there are other occasions, for example when Elijah is roused and fed, during the famine, so as to allow him to resume his ministry as a prophet. God cares for His people, and an expression of this in His feeding them, sustaining them, is not uncommon.

So, when Jesus feeds the 5,000 by Lake Galilee, as we heard there in the Gospel passage from Luke today, it is

a great sign that God is moving amongst His people. And it makes them immediately make the connection, and think: is this the new Moses? ... is this the *Messiah*? ... is this the definitive acting of God in Israel? John's Gospel (the famous ch. 6 of St Jn) makes this connection even clearer, as the people follow up the Feeding of the 5,000 with this direct question to Jesus: "*What sign will You give to show that we should believe in You? What work will You do? Our fathers had manna to eat in the desert ...*" It is clear that they believe that He will do more than merely feed them with bread and fish, howsoever miraculous that already is! ... that this is only a *sign* of greater things to come.

And of course, they are right. Jesus fully intends to work a far, far greater miracle for them in due course: the miracle of the Eucharist. The Feeding of the 5,000 is just a sign of that, following on from all the prior evidence in the OT that God will nourish His people Himself. All those signs, given to Israel, point to one thing: to the greatest way in which God could ever feed us, namely, with His

very own life, His own self, His flesh and blood. Everything in the compassion of God for humanity, everything in the desire of God to be close to His believing people, is leading to this one, sublime Gift, the Sacrament of Sacraments — the Eucharist.

This is why we Catholics make such a big deal of Mass. It's why the Church teaches us unceasingly that: (i) we should come to Mass weekly, Sunday by Sunday, and on the holy days; that we must prepare well for Mass, and give thanksgiving too afterwards; (ii) that we should respect the Blessed Sacrament to the greatest degree, genuflecting to the Lord in the Tabernacle when we come and go from church, or cross in front of it; (iii) that we should examine our hearts and if we are conscious of grave sin to abstain from Holy Communion until we have made our Confession; (iv) that we should make a practice of coming in to the church as often as we can, when passing, in order to pray quietly to Jesus here truly present; (v) that we would do well to use the times of Adoration in order to grow in His love, find peace in our troubled lives, and

simply adore Jesus for being Who He Is, the Son of God made flesh, the flesh made food for our souls in the Eucharist.

As we celebrate this glorious feast of *Corpus Christi*, ‘the Body of Christ,’ we might keep in prayer those children first beginning to receive Jesus in Holy Communion at this time of year, perhaps younger brothers and sisters, or nieces and nephews — it’s a reminder also to call to mind our own First Holy Communion, howsoever long ago, and to ask the Lord that we always receive Jesus in Holy Communion with the reverence taught us when we were younger. May first communicants and their families, and we too, always grow to love Jesus deeply in the Holy Mass. By your devotion to Jesus in the Holy Mass, show that you love the Lord, that you are grateful for His sacrifice that saved you, and that you desire ever closer a union with Him, as He does with you.

At the end of Mass today, to mark the feast, we will have a few mins of Adoration. Together, after the hymn has concluded, we will kneel in Adoration of this sublime

mystery the ‘Most Holy Sacrament’ which is Jesus’s real presence. When we do so, let’s do it out of simple gratitude, honouring and adoring Jesus for allowing Himself to be so intimately close to us. Only God in His deep love for us could have imagined and desired so unique a closeness to us. Let us never underestimate the ravishing beauty of this Sacramental mystery of *Corpus Christi* at the very heart of our Catholic faith!