

Corpus Christi (A)

11<sup>th</sup> June 2023

'Adoration: prayer to Jesus truly present, like Carlo Acutis'

Dt 8: *Man does not live on bread alone ...*

1Cor 10: *communion with the body of Christ*

Jn 6: 51–58: *my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink ...*

Three years ago, as we got to this feast of *Corpus Christi*, we were still waiting for the churches to be allowed to re-open after the first wave of the pandemic. But what I was allowed to do, by this time in the year, was to have twice-daily periods of Eucharistic Adoration out in my parish garden because I had a big grotto to honour Our Lady of Lourdes, and within the grotto an altar. It was a beautiful 'first step' to opening up again for prayer at the church, and a welcome back for the parishioners who had been starved of that encounter with Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Out in the garden it was particularly beautiful to have been able to adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of His Sacred Body surrounded by the wonder of nature: the greenery, the birdsong, and with the incense billowing around amongst the trees and caught in the sunlight — quite atmospheric, very peaceful. After those first, and worst, pandemic months there was something already

blissful, healing and awesome about spending time in the presence of the Sacrament of Jesus's abiding presence. Adoration, and the reserved Blessed Sacrament, allows us *unparalleled* access to Jesus Christ: in the Tabernacle of our church, He can be visited, adored, and honoured, at any hour, day by day. Surely, one of the great fruits of this feast of *Corpus Christi* is the much-needed reminder that the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacrament of Jesus's Body & Blood, is truly and really the living divine presence of the holy Son of God. And that therefore our prayer to Him, our visits to Him, our reverence before Him, is sacred, beneficial, and a highpoint of human religious life.

Today's is a most beautiful feast, which brings to a natural conclusion all the celebrations we've been keeping since Easter. After Jesus's Resurrection we had His appearances to the disciples; then His ascension back to the Father; after that came Pentecost, the sending of the Holy Spirit; and then last Sunday we took joy in the Holy Trinity — God revealed by Jesus as Father, Son and Spirit. That brings us to today, the greatest gift of God to His Church,

the gift of Himself, the gift of the Eucharist. The Church has kept this feast since the year 1264, after a Belgian nun, St Juliana, kept petitioning the bishops and Pope to grant such a feast, so that the Church could honour in a special way the Most Holy Eucharist. It was Pope Urban IV who finally granted this wish, for the whole Church to give witness to a central tenet of our faith, that the Body & Blood of Jesus are truly present in the Mass; that the divine Son of God truly comes to us on the altar, in His sacrifice and resurrection. This feast is a high-point, then, and fitting conclusion to the cycle of feasts we've had since Easter. After today, we return to the cycle of 'Ordinary Sundays of the Year' — and yet, in truth, every Sunday and every day, is a day to rejoice in the abiding presence of Jesus in the Mass and in the Tabernacle: every single day is a chance to praise God for *Corpus Christi*.

The Gospel passage set for this feastday is a portion of Jn 6, that famous chapter in which Jesus describes Himself as the Bread of Life.' I would recommend it as reading for you, today — Jn, ch. 6 — as it's a plain, yet

powerful, teaching of Our Lord, as He prepares the disciples for the gift of the Sacrament that in due course He will bequeath to them at the Last Supper.

<sup>51</sup> I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." ...

<sup>54</sup> he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. <sup>56</sup> He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

These words of Jesus refresh us and remind us that He is truly present where the Body of Christ is tabernacled: He dwells amongst us. I encourage you, then, never to let pass the opportunity to pay a visit for prayer to Jesus truly present. Stop by, whenever you are in Newman House, and seek the Lord's real presence and peace. I know that after tonight the Tuesday 6pm and Sunday 6pm hours of Adoration will formally end for the term, but ??? other times (Pietro et al.?)

I want to bring in two witnesses to support you and encourage you in this holy practice of deeply honouring

Jesus in the Eucharist with a sacrifice of your time, giving up lovingly a precious portion of your day for Him. The first witness is **Pope Benedict**, in His 2007 apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*. In words which our local area Bp, Nicholas, quoted a couple of weeks ago when he hosted the prayer meeting in honour of Bl. Carlo Acutis, Pope Benedict says this:

As Saint Augustine put it: "no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it." In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; Eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the Eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass *prolongs and intensifies* all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, "only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature."

And the second witness is **Bl. Carlo** himself. I learnt so much about him in the 2 events that I attended in the week when his mother was in London. Devotion to Bl. Carlo,

honouring his memory, and trying to live a 21<sup>st</sup>-c. Catholic life like him as a young person, is *inseparable* from devotion to the Holy Eucharist and to Adoration. "Inseparable"! I use the word advisedly. One simply cannot speak of his life without talking about his loving relationship with Our Lord's most holy Sacrament. Bl. Carlo was born in London in 1991, baptized in one of the Catholic churches in Fulham, and then with his family returned to his native Italy as a baby for the rest of his life. He died of leukaemia in 2006, aged only 15, and soon after his original burial was re-buried in Assisi, the native town of St Francis, as had been his wish. He said of his early death, of which he had long had a premonition, "I am happy to die ... because I have lived my life without wasting a minute on those things that do not please God." Probably the most important ways in which Bl. Carlo did not 'waste a minute of his life' was in spending precious hours of his life with the Lord in the Mass, in Holy Communion, in Adoration, and in visiting the Blessed Sacrament. In an extraordinary act of Christian witness, it

was Bl. Carlo that took the lead in his family life towards acts of piety and acts of charity. Even from a very young age, the Lord moved his spirit to desire union with Him. At the age of only 4 or 5 he would encourage his parents and other family members to visit the Blessed Sacrament without fail as they passed churches, and to attend Mass regularly, weekdays as well as Sundays. He received his first Holy Communion at a young age — just 7 yrs old — and as one of the nuns said who witnessed his 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion: “It seemed that something had happened in him, only known to him, something too big that he could not contain.” He began to have such a devotion to the Real Presence that he made it one of his life’s tasks to become an expert in the world’s many ‘Eucharistic miracles,’ which using his prodigious computer skills he proceeded to catalogue and make available as an online exhibition: 160 full-colour web pages, he developed, charting the miracles across 20+ countries: [www.miracolieucaristici.org](http://www.miracolieucaristici.org). This exhibition in a physical format still tours the world, long after Bl. Carlo’s death — one of his many legacies.

But for us — for you! — young Catholics, surely the greatest inspiration of Bl. Carlo is simply his utter singlemindedness when it came to placing Jesus in the Mass and in Adoration as ‘number 1.’ If we think that it is beyond us to give, say, 30 mins a day to prayer to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament here in chapel or in another local church, then think again! A 15-yr-old did it ... and he was doing it when he was a lot younger than 15, too. Let me end with some of Bl. Carlo’s many words on the Holy Eucharist. Let’s take these words to heart, and this *Corpus Christi* promise indeed to give the Lord that bit more of our time in the future ...

*“The Eucharist is the highway to heaven.”*

*“The more Eucharist we receive, the more we will become like Jesus, so that on earth we will have a foretaste of heaven.”*

*“It’s fantastic — like St John all are called to become beloved disciples. All we need is to become Eucharistic souls, adoring souls, allowing God to work those wonders in us, which only He can do. But He wants our will to submit freely. God does not like forcing anyone. He desires our freely-given love.”*