



## Corpus Christi 2015

“When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until you come again.” We often proclaim these words, based on First Corinthians, at the Elevation of the Mass, when we adore the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and so recognise our Risen Lord in the Breaking of Bread. From the very beginnings of the Church in the Upper Room, where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples, and in the Cenacle, where, together with Our Lady, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christians have believed without doubting in the word spoken by the Lord and in its power to bring about what it says, just as “in the beginning” God had said, “Let there be light”, and there was light. This is the faith of the Church today. This is our faith. When at Mass Jesus says, “This is my body, which is given for you,” and “This is the cup of my blood, which is shed for you,” we know that his word is true and what he says, he does.

But it is not only in the Real Presence that Christians believe, for Jesus asks us to “do this as a memorial of me”. The Eucharist is a memorial of the whole life of Christ, from the moment of his coming from the Father by the grace of the Holy Spirit to the moment of his return to the Father and the outpouring of the same Spirit. In other words, the Mass is a commemoration and a celebration of the Incarnation and of the fruits of the Sacrifice of the Word made flesh. What is more, we anticipate and pray for his Second Coming as Judge of the living and the dead.

When we talk about the Sacrifice of the Mass, we naturally think of Christ's Passion, Death and Crucifixion, and, of course, in the Mass, in a very powerful way, we are totally immersed in the Mystery of the Cross, in that aspect of his sacrifice, but the whole of his life is sacrificial, for in him all things are made new, all things are made holy. And so it is that, in the Mass, we celebrate the totality of the Mystery of the Incarnation, the whole Christ event: his Conception in the Virgin's womb, his Nativity in the cave of Bethlehem and his lying in the manger, his Circumcision and first shedding of the Precious Blood for our redemption, and so on. Every moment, every aspect of the life of Jesus is sacrifice, including his Resurrection. It is Christ in his fullness whom we celebrate and whom we receive at Mass, for in the Son we receive the Father and the Holy Spirit. God, though three persons, is but One and in communion with Christ we are united to the Holy Trinity.

But there is something more. In the Gospel, we read of the feeding of the five thousand. With the poor offering of a small boy, five loaves and two fishes, one of the loveliest images in the Bible, Jesus is able to feed the multitude and there is an abundance of food left over, enough to fill twelve baskets. Like the manna in the wilderness, the food with which Jesus feeds us does not run out. He who created all that exists out of nothing can feed the hungry and nourish our souls. As with the widow's mite, he can work miracles with the little we give, especially if it is given with a loving and generous heart. At Mass we give him bread and wine and receive in return his Body and Blood. What an extraordinary exchange of gifts! Even the tiniest crumb of Christ's body and the smallest drop of his blood suffice for us to receive the whole Christ and with Him the Father and the Holy Spirit. There are times when this might not be physically possible, under persecution or through grave illness or for lack

of a priest to celebrate Mass. Then we can receive Christ in spiritual communion, so strong is our desire to give ourselves to him that he might give himself to us. In a mystical sense, the Real Presence is always with those who have given their hearts to Jesus and he is always with us.

In his wonderful book "The Shape of the Liturgy", which I have quoted many times, Dom Gregory Dix said, "Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacles of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and groom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the soul of a dead loved one; - one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unflinching, across all the parishes of Christendom, priests have done just this to make holy the people of God."

Today we give thanks to God for the Blessed Sacrament and for the immense privilege of celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. May our thanksgiving extend to every moment and aspect of our lives that we may never leave the Divine Presence but live in God now and for eternity. Amen.