

## **Corpus Christi (Trinity 1) 3.6.18. 1 Cor.11:23-26**

Thursday was the feast of Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ, – a celebration of the institution of the service of Holy Communion. That gives me an excuse to return to one of my favourite topics – this service of Holy Communion in which we are all involved.

But first a health warning. This is not a neat three point address in which, as the magazine so unhelpfully put it, there is a clear beginning and end and very little in between. This is, what Robert Runcie the late archbishop used to say to us at theological college, a scatter sermon. Lots of bits, like verbal shrapnel, will fly from the pulpit and I hope some of them will sink in!

There is however, a clear structure. There are two foci, the first is my text from St. Paul who said in 1 Corinthians 11; *“For I received from the Lord what I also declare to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”* The second is the great thanksgiving prayer or Eucharistic prayer in your service books on pages 8 and 9. My dear wife says

I ought to have a visual aid. Sometimes these so called aids can be a visual distraction, but if you want a visual aid you have only to turn to pages 8 to 10 of the service booklet.

So let us take note of the first verbal bomb shell - these words from Paul I have just read. What we notice is that there are four actions involved here: Jesus took bread and the cup, he gave thanks over them, he broke the bread and he commanded the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup. One of the great benefits of our modern services is that the taking, the thanking, the breaking and the sharing each have a paragraph assigned to them.

Why do we place such emphasis on these four actions? We do so because they are characteristic of Jesus. They are the pattern of his life and the pattern of life he would have us follow. When Jesus fed the 5000 he *took* the loaves and fishes that he was given. When he was born he accepted life in his home. He taught others to *take up* their cross and follow him. Paul encouraged his readers to *take up* the whole armour of God.

Having taken the five loaves and two fish Jesus lifted them up and *gave thanks*. Paul frequently exhorts his readers to give thanks always and for everything. Giving thanks is a characteristic of the Christian life.

Jesus said; "This is my body which is for you". Some early texts include "broken for you". Jesus' body was broken on the cross, given up to death and to God for us; that we might know his forgiveness and share his eternal life. Most human lives know something of brokenness and the power of healing love.

Jesus shared his life with everyone. When John the Baptist was killed he took the disciples off to a quiet place for some peaceful reflection but it wasn't to be. The crowd followed them and Jesus continued to teach the people and heal those who were brought to him. We share the blessings of our life with those in need in many different ways.

Taking, thanking, being broken and sharing are characteristic of Jesus' life and of the Christian life. Then Paul says that when we share the bread and wine we proclaim Jesus' death until he comes. By participating in this breaking of the bread we are declaring and

proclaiming that *Christ died*, and in eating the bread and drinking from the cup that Christ died *for me*; I *appropriate* his death *for me*; I “take” Christ as “mine”, even as I take and receive broken bread and wine poured out.

How are you doing? We have had the first cluster of shrapnel – the fourfold action. Do you want to come up for air? Can I press on with two significant points about the great thanksgiving or Eucharistic prayer? This long prayer from pages 8 to 9 is divided into three parts: the first tells us something of Jesus’ life, the second prays that the Holy Spirit is sent upon the bread and wine and recalls Jesus’ words at the Last Supper and the third prays for the coming of God’s kingdom. It is to the words in that central section what I want to draw your attention.

We say near the top of page 9, “*send your Holy Spirit, that broken bread and wine outpoured may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.*” The bread and wine do not become the body and blood of Christ by some magical formula which depends on getting words right nor by the holiness of the president, far from it, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. As some of you will know

Ainsdale station is being rebuilt and it is near completion with the old pavement being broken up by the power of a very noisy pneumatic drill. Now a pneumatic drill you might think would be the last thing to recall to my mind the Holy Spirit but it did. It did so because pneumatic is spelt with a silent 'p' reminding those who know that it comes from the Greek word for wind or spirit. This drill works on compressed air and that word 'air' or wind is the same in Hebrew and Greek as spirit. It was, as we were thinking only two weeks ago that the pneuma of God fell upon Jesus' followers and changed them from frightened disciples to fearless apostles. We pray that the same powerful spirit may be sent upon this bread and wine. So when we get to the Eucharistic Prayer look out for that request for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to bless the bread and wine.

Then there are those words of Jesus' "Do this in remembrance of me". This word 'remembrance' translates another very rich Greek word that means so much more than recalling the past by some mental activity. Of course we do recall the Last Supper because that is when Jesus instituted this meal. But we 'remember' much more than that because we 'proclaim'

his death and resurrection until he comes in glory. This 'remembering' is about Christ in his past *and* his future being present to us here and now. If Christ is present to us then we are also present to him. This worship is not so much a matter of bringing Christ down to us as much as raising us up to be with him in heaven. That is why all those Orthodox churches which some of us were recently admiring in Bulgaria paint their ceilings with the apostles and prophets with Christ in glory at the very top.

If through this act of remembrance we are in communion with Christ then we are present also with all those who are with Christ: the saints and angels and the whole company of heaven. All that he holds in existence is in communion with us when we are in communion with him.

So I encourage you to look out for these two highlights of the Eucharistic prayer: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the 'moments' of Jesus life, both earthly and heavenly that we 'remember' in this prayer. And do join in as the choir sings the final 'Amen' which is our 'yes' to the whole prayer.