

## Corpus Christi

4 6 15

Lord Jesus Christ,  
we thank you that in this wonderful sacrament  
you have given us the memorial of your passion:  
grant us so to reverence the sacred mysteries  
of your body and blood  
that we may know within ourselves  
and show forth in our lives  
the fruits of your redemption;  
for you are alive and reign with the Father  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Thursday, the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday, is the Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion or, if you prefer the shorter, snappier title in Latin, Corpus Christi. Like Ascension Day and the Day of Pentecost, Corpus Christi is a moveable feast, dependent, in any particular year, on the date of Easter which, like Passover, is determined by the variable date of the relevant full moon.

There are different ways of understanding the act that is central to our worship on Sundays or on a Thursday: as the Real Presence of Christ in the bread and in the wine – transubstantiation or consubstantiation; as the symbolic presence of Christ in remembering of Christ's passion through the symbolism of the broken bread

and wine out-poured during the Last Supper. In the Christian Church, there are different ways of making sense of what is essentially a mystery and you are free to choose how exactly to make sense of something that is, essentially, a meeting point, an interface between God and Man. With your permission and your indulgence this morning, I'd like to try to understand the Holy Communion in terms of its symbolism.

Holy Communion is essentially a meal. There are two items on the menu: food and drink. Both are necessary to sustain life. In John's gospel, Jesus says 'I am the bread of life' (6 v35) and to the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar, Jesus says he is the source of living water (4 v13 - 14). In our service of Holy Communion, in a snack rooted in the Last Supper, we have bread and wine. The bread at the original meal would have been unleavened because Jesus, a Jew, was celebrating Passover. For us, it is a wafer from a convent in Paramé which suggests in essence matzah or pain azyme, if you prefer the French phrase for unleavened bread. The wine would have been alcoholic, red; ours is fortified red wine, port from Portugal bought from a local supermarket. It's red because red is the colour of blood - though in the old days here at St Bart's, it used to be sweet white wine because it was considered to be more pure if white and, besides, white wine didn't stain the white linen so much !

So there are two elements of the meal, two symbols. How, then, do they remind us of Jesus ?

Well the bread is Christ's body. We are a religion of incarnation, of the word made flesh, of God embodied. Jesus will die on the cross for the sins of mankind. His body will be broken for us just as the bread is broken.

The wine is Christ's blood. His blood will be shed for us. When the nails pierced his hands and his feet there was necessarily blood. When the spear pierced his side, there was inevitably a flow of blood. The shedding of his blood is symbolised in the flow of the wine.

Bread represents one essential of life – solid food. Wine represents another essential of life – liquid. In Jewish terms, the blood is the life force of any living creature and, as far as possible, should not be ingested. But here, in drinking his blood, we are purposefully, deliberately being gifted with that very life force.

Well, as to the real or symbolic presence of Christ at Holy Communion, you should decide for yourselves. But let me say this this morning: on a symbolic level, if you think about it, Christ is with us today in a most powerful way so we should be thankful for the institution of Holy Communion as command of Christ to follow.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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