

Closing Prayer

God ever faithful,
you have made a covenant with your people
in the gift of your Son,
who offered his body for us
and poured out his blood for the many.

As we celebrate this eucharistic sacrifice,
build up your Church
by deepening within us the life of your covenant
and by opening our hearts to those in need.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · The Body and Blood of Christ, Year B³

CPL • LBC Year B Corpus Christi.odt • 2021-06-03

³ *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

Corpus Christi

Thursday after Trinity Sunday

Principal Service readings

Genesis 14.18-20	Melchizedek brings bread and wine
Psalms 116.10-17	'the sacrifice of thanksgiving'
1 Corinthians 11.23-26	Institution of the eucharist
John 6.51-58	The living bread from heaven

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus, the living bread

Jesus said to the Jews: ⁵⁴'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' ⁵³So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.'

John 6.51-58 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

Following on from the feeding of the five thousand, most of John 6 is about the 'bread of life'. However, verses 51-58 clearly reflect eucharistic traditions found elsewhere in the New Testament.² The use of the terms 'bread', 'flesh', 'I will give', and 'for the sake of' indicate a discrete section within John 6 that deals with the Eucharist. Behind the eucharistic language there is the fundamental issue of Jesus' self-gift for the life of the world. This gift is an outrageous suggestion, and so 'the Jews' question: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' (6.52), but this gives Jesus the opportunity to conclude his discourse on his perfection of the Mosaic gift of bread from heaven through his gift of himself as the true bread from heaven. The critics of Jesus are unable to go beyond the physical, and so misunderstand Jesus' promise. Jesus' insistence on the 'flesh' and 'blood' emphasises that it is the incarnate life and very real death of the Son that are the life-giving food.

The people of Israel were nourished by eating the manna, which is constantly recalled to them in the nourishment provided by the Torah and their receptivity to it. Now 'the Jews' are told of the absolute need to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man. A shift from the more respectable verb 'to eat' (*phagein*) to a verb that indicates physical crunching with the teeth (*trogein*), emphasises that the real experience of eating is intended. Jesus will give his flesh and blood in a violent death for the life of the world (6.51c) in which his body will be broken and his blood poured out (6.53-54). Through a total absorption of the revelation made available through the death of Jesus, believers will come to a mutuality in which they live in Jesus and Jesus lives in them (6.56). This mutual indwelling flows from the union that exists between the Father and the Son (6.57). The idea of the reception of the revelation of God in and through the Son is not new (see, for example, 3.11-12, 31=36) but the imagery has been changed by the context of the Passover. No longer does Jesus speak of 'belief in' (see 3.12, 15, 18 3) but of 'the one who eats me' (6.57b). The Law was a gift from God (see 1.17), but it has been surpassed by Jesus, the bread from heaven (6.35), promising his abiding presence (6.56), communicating the life of the

² See, for example, *The eucharistic words of Jesus* / Joachim Jeremias. 1966. p.106-108.

Father to all who consume this true bread (6.57). This true bread eclipses all the original bread offered at the Passover (6.58).

Quotations

1

There is nothing so great as the Eucharist. If God had something more precious, He would have given it to us.

St John Vianney, 1786 – 1859

2

... In this world I cannot see the Most High Son of God with my own eyes, except for His Most Holy Body and Blood.

St Francis of Assisi, 1181 or 1182 – 1226

3

Receive Communion often, very often ... there you have the sole remedy, if you want to be cured. Jesus has not put this attraction in your heart for nothing.

St Thérèse of Lisieux, 1873–1897

Related topics

For further study:

Corpus Christi; eucharist; symbol of bread and wine; Christology; sacramentality; eucharistic prayer; providence of God; Incarnation; paschal mystery; Body of Christ.