

Corpus Christi

Thursday after Trinity Sunday

Principal Service readings

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| 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

The living bread from heaven

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

'Corpus Christi' is the popular name of the feast, the Church of England calls 'Thanksgiving for the Institution of the Holy Communion' and the Roman Catholic Church calls 'Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ' – the addition of the word 'blood' in the Roman Missal indicates a fuller understanding of the sacrament to include the mystery of the 'precious blood'. Corpus Christi duplicates what is already celebrated on Maundy Thursday. However, the Maundy Thursday celebration cannot fully enter into fullness of joy as it is inextricably tied up with the suffering of Good Friday. Corpus Christi, then, focuses explicitly on joy in the blessed sacrament.

In John 6 Jesus provides a discourse on the bread from heaven. Verses 51-58 are overtly eucharistic. Have they been added on to a discourse which originally was not eucharistic? Some scholars think so. However, verses 25-59 can be interpreted as a commentary on the words from scripture: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat' (6.31; cf. Psalm 78.24). Five interventions from the crowd give the dialogue its shape. It is propelled forward at each stage, developing new themes, until it becomes explicitly eucharistic at the end.

Jesus makes an outrageous suggestion that is picked up by 'the Jews', who question: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' (6.52). This allows Jesus 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 terms 'flesh' and 'blood' emphasise that it is the incarnate life and very real death of the Son that are the life-giving food.

Quotations

1

Farmers everywhere provide bread for all humanity, but it is Christ alone who is the bread of life...Even if all the physical hunger of the world were satisfied, even if everyone who is hungry were fed by his or her own labour or by the generosity of others, the deepest hunger of man would still exist...Therefore, I say, Come, all of you, to Christ. He is the bread of life. Come to Christ and you will never be hungry again.

Pope John Paul II

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2

In an age of information overload ... the last thing any of us needs is more information about God. We need the practice of incarnation, by which God saves the lives of those whose intellectual assent has turned them dry as dust, who have run frighteningly low on the Bread of Life, who are dying to know more God in their bodies. Not more about God. More God.

Rachel Held Evans, 1981 – 2019

Related topics

For further study:

Eucharist; evangelisation; eucharist as forgiveness of sins; eucharist as Body of Christ

Closing Prayer

You have blessed all generations,
O God most high,
in Jesus, our compassionate Saviour,
for through him you invite us to your kingdom,
welcome us to your table,
and provide us with nourishment in abundance.

Teach us to imitate your unfailing kindness
and to build up Christ's body, the Church,
by generously handing on to others
the gifts we have received from your bounty.

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 · Corpus Christi, Year C²

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2 *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.*

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