

Corpus Christi, Year C

Today we are celebrating the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. We are remembering with gratitude and celebrating with joy Jesus' gift to us of his Body and Blood. What does it mean to give our body and blood for someone? To give our body is to give our work, our activity, our energy. To give our blood is to give our life, to give our heart. We can give our body for someone - we can work for them - but it is only when we give our heart as well, that our gift is truly personal. To give our body and blood for someone, is another way of saying that we love them with 'our heart, mind, soul and strength'(Mark 12:30).

I think of my father, suffering from asthma and with a bad heart, going in each day to work in a draughty passageway, checking the arrival and departure of wine and spirits from a large Toothy complex in Sydney – earning a living for us eight children. I think of my mother managing the home and creating the space where my father could find peace, and where we children could learn by example that our lives mattered, and that it was important to live to the full, contributing what we had to offer for the wellbeing of others.

We could think of some of our teachers. We could think of the thousands of public servants who spend their days creating and maintaining the environment which we tend to take for granted till we visit a country where it is lacking, and realise, with gratitude, how blessed we are.

Today we think of Jesus. He gave his body for us. He poured out his life for us. He gave himself, day in and day out, to teach and to heal, to comfort and to challenge, to forgive and to love. In a thousand practical ways, he gave himself to us, showing us what it means for God to hold us in existence. As he says: 'The Father goes on working and so do I'(John 5:17). He gave himself for us, making the ultimate sacrifice of his life. He loved us when it was easy and he loved us when it was hard. In giving himself – his body and blood – for us so convincingly, he revealed to us that, whoever we are and whatever we have done and wherever we have been and whatever others may think of us, God loves us and wants us to live and to live to the full. He showed that it is not sin that keeps us from God's love, it is sin to which we cling stubbornly – sin from which we refuse to repent. The beautiful welcome that Jesus extended to sinners made repentance possible. The welcome of the community to the Eucharist has the same effect today.

Today's readings focus on the priestly aspect of Jesus' offering. While we think of this we must not forget that each of us at Baptism was consecrated to Jesus and share in his priesthood. As the child or adult is anointed with the holy chrism, he or she is consecrated king, prophet and priest. The purpose of the priesthood is to make us holy, that is to say, to bring about communion between us and God. The Vatican Council reminds us that we are all called to be holy, and reminds us also that holiness consists in love: 'The holiness of the Church is constantly shown forth in the fruits of grace that the Spirit produces in the faithful, and so must it be. It is expressed in many ways by individuals who, each in his or her own state of life, tend to the perfection of love'(Vatican II Lumen Gentium 39).

Jesus our priest does this in two ways, and all the baptised who share in his priesthood, are called to share in these ways. The priest's primary call is to mediate God's word. How can people be attracted to want to be in communion with a God whom they do not know? Jesus continues to do this by constantly reminding us of the Good News of God's forgiving and healing

love. He did this by his word; he did it by his manner, by his smile, by his welcome. He does it by the gift of himself. In the Second Reading of today's Mass, Saint Paul reminds us of Jesus' words at the Last Supper: 'Do this in memory of me'(1Corinthians 11:24)). Do what? Do what I have done. Give your lives, pour out your life-blood, your energy, your spirit, your love, for each other, just as I have. 'Love one another as I have loved you'(John 15:12). We are invited to speak God's word to each other in the same way as Jesus does: by our words, by our manner, by giving ourselves (our body and blood) to each other, by loving one another as Jesus loves us.

The other function of priesthood is what is called 'sacrifice'. It is important not to misunderstand this term. Its root meaning is 'to make sacred', 'to make holy'. It means to take people's response to God's love and to offer it to God, thus uniting them to the source of all life and love. Jesus did this by welcoming and embracing all and sharing his prayer communion with them, thus making them holy. We are to welcome each other to the community of love which is the Body of Christ in the world and offer ourselves and each other to God the source of all life and of all holiness. This is why parents love to bring their children here to the Eucharist, and why there is so much pain when youngsters are pressurised to stay away by their peers who are ignorant of the meaning of this profound communion.

The Vatican Council has this to say: 'Christ's faithful should be instructed by God's word, and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves. Through Christ the mediator they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other so that finally God may be all in all'(Vatican II, SC n.48). 'All their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if they are patiently borne - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God'(Vatican II, LG n.34).

Jesus wants the whole world to come to know God's love. He wants the whole of creation to be a sacrament of love. The bread that we placed on the altar today, and the wine poured into the chalice, will, by a miracle of God's grace, be caught up into the mystery of God and become, for us, a sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus wants everything to be a sacrament of his love. He wants the whole world to be transformed by love into a new creation. He wants every celebration to be sacred so that his life-blood may be poured into all the thirsty hearts of our world. Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest and scientist who died in the middle fifties, wrote: 'It is a matter of life and death that the earth should flourish to the utmost of its natural powers ... Too many Christians are insufficiently conscious of the divine responsibility of their lives. They live just like other people, giving only half of themselves, never experiencing the spur or the intoxication of advancing the kingdom of God in every domain. If you must blame us, then blame our weakness, not our faith. Our faith imposes upon us the right and the duty to throw ourselves into the things of the earth'(Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu* page 69).

Today, as we receive his body and blood in communion, let our hearts fill with gratitude for this amazing gift from the heart of the risen Jesus who wants not only to be close to us, but to fill our veins, to dwell within us as in a temple and to bring with him his Father and the Spirit who

unites them in love.

Let us also remember that in receiving his body and drinking his blood, we are making a commitment to do what Jesus did. We are saying 'Yes' to his request that we love one another just as he loved us. He wants to live his life in us. We are committing ourselves to offer our lives for each other, indeed, for the world.

Our baptismal vows commit us to give 'all our heart and mind and soul and strength' to bring about the reign of God's love. It is a commitment to love the world with the love of the heart of God. We cannot be content till we see the whole world opening its arms to embrace God. Nothing less can satisfy the hunger and thirst in our hearts. In the meantime, let us today open our hearts to receive Jesus, for it is he who, working in us, will, as Paul promises, 'accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine'(Ephesians 3:20).