CORPUS CHRISTI 2020.

Corpus Christi is one of a series of great Feast days that we celebrate around this time of year, for after Pentecost, the 50th day of Easter, we then have Trinity Sunday-last Sunday for us, today the following Sunday - Corpus Christi, which off course in previous years was always celebrated on a Thursday, but now moved to the following Sunday. Also this coming Friday we have the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that wonderful feast day when we celebrate the loving heart of Jesus, and then Saturday, the next day is celebrated as the immaculate heart of Mary.

It is though a particular difficult time to celebrate this Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, because most of us cannot receive it at this time, and have not done for 3 months or more. We would also have been building up to our 1st Holy Communion as well, but that has been delayed off course. In normal times though one good reason for having this day, is just to remind ourselves what a special thing the eucharist is, because we can so easily take it for granted, we are so used to celebrating mass together, so used to receiving holy communion each week, that we can forget how special it is, and perhaps not always treat it with the reverence and respect that we should do.

Our Gospel reading today helps us to do this, although strangely it is not an account of the last supper, our 2nd reading today gave us part of that from St. Pauls letter to the Corinthians, but rather part of St. Johns Gospel, from Chapter 6, what is known as the Bread of Life sermon, teaching Our Lord gave soon after the great miracle of the feeding of the 5000. In this teaching, only the last bit of which we heard today, Jesus describes himself as the bread of life, the bread come down from heaven and begins, as we heard today, to speak very explicitly. We are commanded to eat his body and drink his blood, and by doing this he lives in us and we live in him, and then we can live for ever, because with Christ we are one, through the body and blood we have consumed. This gift is compared to the giving of the Manna in the desert during the Exodus, that bread which the Hebrews collect every morning, which was referenced in our 1st reading from Deuteronomy. That Manna was special, it was bread from heaven, it was a wonderful gift, but as nothing compared to the gift of the very body and blood of Jesus. All those who eat that Manna in the desert died in the desert, but those of us who eat the Eucharist, can live for ever, it is bread for eternal life. You have to wonder what those listening to this teaching must have thought, in fact we know, because immediately after this passage, John the evangelist tells us that many of his followers said they couldn’t accept this and left him. A view still mirrored in the world today, when so many of our fellow Christians fail to understand the eucharist in this way, as the substantial presence of Jesus himself, who feeds us with his own body and blood for eternal life.

That gift of the eucharist was, of course, first given to the disciples at the last supper, which we heard St. Paul describe to us in the 2nd reading from his letter to the Corinthians, part of the first written record of the last supper, written much earlier than any of the Gospels - when he commanded them to remember him to proclaim his suffering and death, in other words to proclaim his wonderful love, by offering bread and wine, which would become for them his very body and blood, a gift which would bring them forgiveness of their sins, union and oneness with him, and everlasting life, the Eucharist or holy communion is the bread from heaven. What a wonderful gift it is, how generous God is to us, giving us the body and blood of his son Paul is reminding those first christens in Corinth, that the Eucharist, or what they called the breaking of bread was no ordinary meal, but a ritual meal, in which they were proclaiming the death of Jesus, the were remembering the price paid for their salvation, for the forgiveness of their sins, and that they should treat it with respect and reverence. Also that in the eucharist there wasn’t just union with Christ, but also union with one another, since they all ate from the same plate and drank from the one cup, making them one, one with Christ and one with each other, in the Church, which is the very body of Christ.

I am sure that we all cherish the gift of holy communion, but lets just remind ourselves, what happens at every mass, we talk about the sacrifice of the mass, we say the mass is a sacrifice, meaning that it isn’t just a remembering of what happened to Jesus on Good Friday, his suffering and death, it is not just symbolic, we believe that we are made present at the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, we are here at the foot of the cross watching Jesus suffering and death. It doesn’t happen again, we are made present at that one moment when he Gods son offered his life as a sacrifice for us, out of love for us. We should stand speechless, dumbfounded. We also talk about the real presence, that the bread and wine, really do become the body and blood of Jesus, we are in his
presence, which of course is always with us, with reservation of communion in the tabernacle. These beliefs on how special the Eucharist is and what happens here in every mass explains so much of what we do in Church, the smells and bells if you will, all our kneeling and genuflecting, the reverence we show in our words, gestures and postures, all point to what we believe is happening.

Finally on this day we would also normally be re-commissioning all our Eucharistic ministers and also commissioning new ministers, appointing them to help distribute holy communion in Church and to take it to the housebound. One of the questions they would be asked is, will you treat the Eucharist with the utmost dignity and respect. We could all ask ourselves the same question, are we well prepared to receive the Eucharist, do we receive it attentively and respectfully, are we prayerful, do we give thanks to God afterwards, is it an inspiration to us in our lives of faith, in our relationships, it certainly should be. More than anything else let us be thankful, thankful to God's great generosity to us, his abundant generosity in giving us his own son as the food for everlasting life. Perhaps one fruit of not being able to receive Holy Communion for the last few months, will be perhaps a greater appreciation of the eucharist, to treasure even more such a wonderful gift. Please God, we pray that we will be gathered together here again soon, to receive the body and blood of Christ together again.

We have begun our preparations for re-opening, although no date yet, myself and a number of parishioners are undertaking the risk assessments necessary and working out what we will need to do in Church, Church may look very different when we do return, with all kinds of signage, a one way system, etc. There will be a need for stewards to man the Church for times of private prayer, if any parishioners would be interested please e-mail me so we can begin to put together a list. Obviously it can't be anyone who is self isolating or with health conditions etc.

Also this week some building works begin, the construction of the new boiler house for the new church boiler, and a new downstairs toilet in the presbytery. In the yard at the side of the presbytery the existing old coal shed, which now contains the rubbish bins, will be converted/extended into a new boiler house, to contain the new church boiler, when this is finished the work on the new downstairs toilet will begin, making use of the porch at the back of the presbytery, which will be blocked in creating the new toilet. Hopefully these works will be completed in time for the work on the new church heating system to begin in mid July, with the installation of the new boiler and the new pipes and radiators in Church, which will take 5-6 weeks, from Monday to a Thursday.