

Thursday 30 May 2024

Corpus Christi



In many parts of Europe, during medieval times, Corpus Christi was a time when the annual mystery plays were performed. The most famous were in York and occurred for at least 200 years until the sixteenth century when the Protestant Reformers suppressed them.

The Church always celebrates the feast of Corpus Christi on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. Its Latin name means 'body of Christ'; an alternative name is 'The Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion'.

Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration are included at the end.

The hymn can be accessed via a YouTube link. Please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Bread of heaven](#)

[\(click to hear the hymn\)](#)

The welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

You then, who truly and earnestly repent of your sins,
and are in love and charity with your neighbours,
and intend to lead a new life,
following the commandments of God,
and walking from this day forward in his holy ways:
draw near with faith,
and take this holy sacrament to your comfort;
and make your humble confession to almighty God.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

All Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

The Collect for Corpus Christi

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 for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the first book of Moses called Genesis

Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. *Genesis 14:18-20*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 I received the living bread

[\(click to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.'

Jesus then said, 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

'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. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so

the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.’ *John 6:35–40; 51–58*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

A timebomb lies at the heart of today’s discussion. The Gospel passage from John 6 prefigures the Last Supper during which Jesus shared bread and wine and told us to do so ‘in remembrance’ of him. We have other versions of the Last Supper in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and an explicitly second-hand version from St Paul which today’s epistle reproduces, but what is the imagery saying to us?

St John always writes carefully and never says anything without a reason. So we sit up and notice when he uses an extremely rare word in his Gospel, and it appears only twice, first at the wedding in Cana in John 2 and then when describing the feeding of the five thousand in John 6. St Paul faithfully copies that same word. In all three instances, Jesus **gives thanks and distributed** (from which we get the word ‘Eucharist’). He invites us to sense that something groundbreaking is going on here.

In John 2, Jesus blesses water and, miraculously, it becomes wine—good wine, the very best, and he supplies it in massive superabundance. But a further change occurs: it starts as water for use during ceremonial washing; as water it merely touches the *outer surface* of a body but the miraculous wine *enters* the body: that wedding guests drink it implies celebration and pleasure. Furthermore, in the Scriptures, vines and their fruit, wine, always imply a metaphor for the chosen people of God. The Old Testament overflows with examples. Think of Joshua sending spies into the promised land and they see clusters of grapes too heavy to carry; stealing a vineyard demonstrates the evil lurking in the heart of bad King Ahab; Isaiah explores many parables about vines and vineyards. It is therefore no coincidence when Jesus calls himself ‘the true vine’ for he personifies that sense of chosen-ness. The message in John 2 is therefore more than a trick with water for Jesus intends the miracle to show multiplication and, because he uses wine, it relates to the chosen people. That the miracle changes water into wine suggests that Jesus wishes to create an even better ‘chosen people’; the multiplication implies so huge number they are now too many to count. Jesus **gave thanks and distributed** which

catalyses the conversion and multiplication; his miracles therefore ensures that everyone can enjoy the wedding. And a wedding joins two houses.

Next, in John 6, Jesus takes several small loaves of bread and again a huge multiplication occurs—he makes prodigious amounts of bread. In poor communities, bread is essential for life. This multiplying of bread reminds us of Moses in the wilderness when God provided heavenly bread, the Manna, for the Chosen People during their arduous journey through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. And, using a visual metaphor, Jesus also calls himself ‘the bread of life’: just as God fed the Chosen People with Manna so Jesus feeds us with himself to ensure that we reach our own promised land of heaven. To that end, he again **gives thanks and distributes**, this time using bread. And, yet again, there is a change not only in the amount of bread but in its properties: just as water wets the surface of a body but wine enters the body through drinking, so bread feeds a *stomach* before it is blessed but after God intervenes it feeds a *soul*.

Finally, we are now equipped to read today’s Epistle from 1 Corinthians 11. Given its use of language, we should expect that when Jesus **gives thanks and distributes** both bread and wine at the Last Supper, more will happen than meets the eye—and it does. Following John 6 and John 2, we expect both a multiplication but also a widening of when Jesus **gives thanks and distributes** the bread and wine but this time the superabundance is spiritual. God soaks into mere grape juice and mere barley bread: they start as food and drink but change during the multiplying process to nourish the entire Body of Christ on earth: the Church.

We can now tie all these elements together: the wine multiplies at Cana and helps start a marriage: he is creating a new chosen people. The bread multiplies on a Galilean hillside and helps nourish us as we travel toward new promised lands, the Kingdom and thence heaven. At the last Supper, Jesus creates the means to unite two kingdoms in a relationship so profound he implies a marriage: differences between people melt away as the Body of Christ comes into being; earth joins with heaven; God joins with His people.

It’s now our turn. At this Eucharist today, we also **give thanks and distribute** first bread then wine and, we must remember, it is not merely bread that he multiplies, and it is not just wine he produces. He intends a miraculous explosion of godliness to nourish all of us in a spiritual sense; and he does so to make us into the people of God, catapulting us into eternal life. He intends that new life to be so intense that it implies marriage. And it all starts today at this altar, and it all starts now.

Prayers of intercession

Lord, listen to the prayers of your people,
gathered at your table.

In faith we pray:

All we pray to you our God.

Here, where we celebrate how Christ gave us his body
to be our spiritual food,
listen as we pray for his body the Church,
spread throughout the world ...

In faith we pray:

All we pray to you our God.

Here, where we recognize the presence of Christ,
who takes away the sin of the world,
listen as we pray for that world
and for its peoples for whom his blood was shed ...

In faith we pray:

All we pray to you our God.

Here, where we come together as Christ gathered with his friends
to give us this meal of holy fellowship,
listen as we pray for all whom you have given us,
our friends and all whose lives are joined with ours ...

In faith we pray:

All we pray to you our God.

Here, where we remember the night of Christ's agony and trial,
listen as we pray for all who share his sufferings
through fear or pain or distress of many kinds ...

In faith we pray:

All we pray to you our God.

Here, where we join our praises with the whole company of heaven,
listen as we pray for all who have trusted Christ's promise
to raise up on the last day those who eat his flesh and
drink his blood ...

In faith we pray:

All we pray to you our God.

Lord, satisfy our hunger with the food that lasts,
the bread of God which comes down from heaven
and gives life to the world,
Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

All we pray to you our God.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

We are the Body of Christ.

In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.

Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life.

The peace of the Lord be always with you:

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Bread of heaven on thee we feed

[\(click to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

HYMN 4 O thou who at this Eucharist didst pray

[\(click to hear the hymn\)](#)

The Dismissal

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him.

He had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. *Luke 24:31a, 35*

May the Father,
who fed his children with manna in the wilderness,
strengthen you in your pilgrimage to the Promised Land.

All Amen.

May the Son,
who gave his flesh for food and his blood for drink,
keep you in eternal life and raise you up on the last day.

All Amen.

May the Holy Spirit,
who leads us into all truth,
help you discern the Lord's body
and empower you to proclaim his death until he comes.

All Amen

And the blessing of God the Almighty.
father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good,
our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks and praise,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ our great high priest.
He offered himself to you as the Lamb without blemish,
the acceptable gift that gives you perfect praise.
At the Last Supper, seated with his apostles,
he left this memorial of his passion
to bring us its saving power until the end of time.
In this great sacrament you feed your people
and strengthen them in holiness,
so that throughout the world the human family
may be enlightened by one faith
and drawn together in one communion of love.
We come to this foretaste of your heavenly banquet
to be transformed by your grace
and restored in the image and likeness of the risen Christ.
Therefore earth unites with heaven
to sing a new song of praise;
we too join with angels and archangels
as they proclaim your glory without end:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

All **Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.
Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.
Eat and drink
in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All **We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.**

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

All praise to you, our God and Father,
for you have fed us with the bread of heaven
and quenched our thirst from the true vine:
hear our prayer that, being grafted into Christ,
and feast with him in his kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

All **Almighty God,**
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out
in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.