

Corpus Christi 2026

Deuteronomy 8.2-3, 14-16

1 Corinthians 10.16-17

John 6.51-58

We now say that the Feast of Corpus Christi falls on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, but this was not always so; not because the Feast has ever moved in our liturgical calendar—except to be transferred to the nearest Sunday—but because Corpus Christi predates Trinity Sunday by seven decades. In the papal bull *Transiturus de hoc mundo*, Pope Urban IV describes Corpus Christi as falling on the first Thursday after the *octave of Pentecost*. This makes it sound as if he wanted us to celebrate this great gift of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood just after Eastertide; which surely reminds us of yet another Thursday dedicated to the Lord's Supper, which of course occurs just before Eastertide. In other words, Eastertide is a Eucharistic sandwich; or maybe the Eucharist is an Eastertide sandwich—or both.

The liturgical location of Maundy Thursday makes the Eucharist a memorial of Christ's death and passion; that much is obvious. And the liturgical location of Corpus Christi—just on the other side of

Easter tide—makes the Eucharist a celebration of Christ's resurrection. This is to say that, in the Eucharist, not only is the crucified Christ given to us, but also the risen and ascended Christ. In the Eucharist, the passion and death of Christ are made present to us, and also his resurrection and ascension.

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Much is made, though always and appropriately with circumspection, of the ways in which the resurrected body of Jesus was—is—simultaneously continuous and discontinuous with his earthly body. The risen Jesus eats and drinks; his wounds are still present and palpable. But he appears and vanishes, even in locked rooms; he is not recognised, until he is. Whatever it is, this body is an object of another world, and yet it is in this one.

The same can therefore be said of the sacrament, which is, after all, that of the glorified Body and Blood of Christ. It too is an artefact of another world, which brings that world into ours, changing it from within, making it a new creation. And, in particular, making *us* a new creation, the Church, which is, after all, called also to be Christ's Body. And what that means for us is also signified by

the Sacrament itself, in which Christ gives of himself to us so that we can be drawn into communion with him.

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It is most peculiar that, in our debates over eucharistic theology, “sacrifice” and “communion” are often seen as mutually exclusive terms of understanding the nature of the sacrament. And it is peculiar because, of course, communion requires sacrifice. This is true even in the most banal cases: the modern and utterly uncontroversial way of articulating this is to say that relationships require mutual compromise, that is to say, the at least partial setting aside of our own preferences to accommodate those of others.

There is, admittedly, a strong disanalogy between this mundane truism and, say, the doctrine of the atonement that lies behind our eucharistic theology. The necessity of mutual compromise in human relationships assumes various kinds of parity between parties that do not apply in the relationship between us and God, the asymmetric relationship *par excellence*. If communion requires sacrifice, then in the case of divine-human relations, surely it is only we

who must give up on our misaligned desires in conformity to the Absolute Good.

And yet, this is not what happens in the Christian story. It is God who makes the necessary sacrifice on the cross, which is echoed in the Eucharist, wherein God, not content merely to come in our midst, goes further still in the indefatigable mission to be close to us, even to dwell within us, filling us with this unreasonable love.

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This, then, must be what it means to be the Church, what it means to be denizens of the New Creation, which has already been inaugurated in Christ, whose eucharistic Body nourishes the Church so that she may live as his ecclesial Body, the first fruits of this new world. It is to embody the communion of mutual self-sacrifice, in which we all put one another before ourselves, giving of ourselves for the betterment of others.

This is, needless to say, *not* what the Church actually looks like; nor any particular instantiation of it in any local context, not even in such a wonderful, functional church like this one—he says, looking around to see if anyone is rolling their eyes. And

perhaps this is to be expected, the Church also being a motley collection of ragamuffins, besides all this hifalutin stuff about the sacramentally-fed Body of Christ. But such as admission too quickly, too easily becomes an excuse for poor behaviour, and especially for refusing to try to live together as we know we ought. And this is a scandal.

There is nothing especially difficult to believe in the idea that Christ is substantially present in the Eucharist under the species of bread and wine. Especially not for us who already believe in God and, furthermore, in the incarnation. The really incredible thing is to believe that the Church actually believes it, takes it seriously that our very food is the self-giving of God that makes communion possible between God and humanity, and us with each other. Precious little in the history of the Church provides evidence for this, and that is and should be a matter of Our great sorrow.

Let our commitment not only be to mere doctrine, but also to what our beliefs entail for how we ought to live together as a Church. We, who Sunday after Sunday, ingest this sacrament of self-sacrifice for the good of others, who take it into our bellies, let us take it also into our hearts. Let us enter truly into the new world, this resurrection life, of which this

sacrament is our sign and into which it calls us, draws us. In our baptism, we have died in Christ and are alive anew in him, not only a new life but a new kind of life. In the eucharist, we receive this new life's food, which must energise us into living it faithfully, enable us—all of us, mutually—to put ourselves aside, our preferences and privileges and gripes and grievances, for each other's sake.

This is, of course, a tall order; it will take a miracle to even come close to fulfilling it—even the miracle of the Eucharist itself, the miracle of the resurrection.