

Closing Prayer

The bread you give, O God,
is Christ's flesh for the life of the world;
the cup of his blood
is your covenant for our salvation.

Grant that we who worship Christ in this holy mystery
may reverence him in the needy of this world
by lives poured out for the sake of that kingdom
where he lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · The Body and Blood of Christ, Year A²

CPL • LBC Year A Corpus Christi.odt • 2020-05-24

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.

Corpus Christi

Thursday after Trinity Sunday

Principal Service readings

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

Jesus, the living bread

Jesus said to the Jews: ⁵¹'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

The title *Corpus Christi* means ‘Body of Christ’. It is a celebratory feast. The idea of it is not to focus on the corpse of Jesus on the cross, his body during his earthly ministry, but to focus on Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. The body and blood of Christ we celebrate in the consecrated bread and wine is Christ himself today.

The gospel reading today is not from the Last Supper that we might expect. Instead, it is part of a long chapter in which Jesus speaks of ‘the bread of life’. It might seem to be quite a repetitive chapter, but Jesus moves the argument on as the dialogue progress, and by the time we get to today’s passage his hearers are beginning to react: ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ (6.52) they question dismissively. In reply, Jesus doesn’t apologise for the misunderstanding. He does not say his words were only a metaphor, and not to be taken literally. Instead, he adds the term ‘blood’ to ‘flesh’ and continues to insist that unless someone consumes his ‘flesh and blood’ they will not have life within them (6.53). He contrasts what he is offering with the manna from heaven ‘our ancestors ate (Exodus 16) – they are dead, ‘but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever’ (John 6.58). He is talking about something physical but also something spiritual. He will offer his real human life to bring us eternal life.

The Church gives us this feast day to reflect on the sacramental life by which we participate in the divine life. When we receive holy communion we receive the promise of eternal life. The consecrated bread and wine that we receive are part of a eucharistic process, a self-giving of Christ himself, bread broken and wine poured out in service and in love. The eucharistic process prompts us to offer ourselves, to be like Christ, an offering for the needs of humanity today. The Eucharist is a call for Christian action.

Quotations

1

In the long run [the Eucharist] will be its own interpreter and teacher. For the supreme question is not what we make of the Eucharist but what the Eucharist is making of us.

Michael Ramsey, 1904–1988

2

It is in the Eucharist that the community of God’s people is fully manifested.

Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry / World Council of Churches. – Geneva, 1982. – (The Lima Report). – (Faith and Order Paper; 111. – Eucharist, 19

3

In the paschal event and the Eucharist which makes it present throughout the centuries, there is a truly enormous ‘capacity’ which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption. This amazement should always fill the Church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist.

Ecclesia de Eucharistia / John Paul II, 17 April 2003

Related topics

For further study:

Corpus Christi; eucharist; symbol of bread and wine; Christology; sacramentality; eucharistic prayer; providence of God; Incarnation; paschal mystery; Body of Christ.