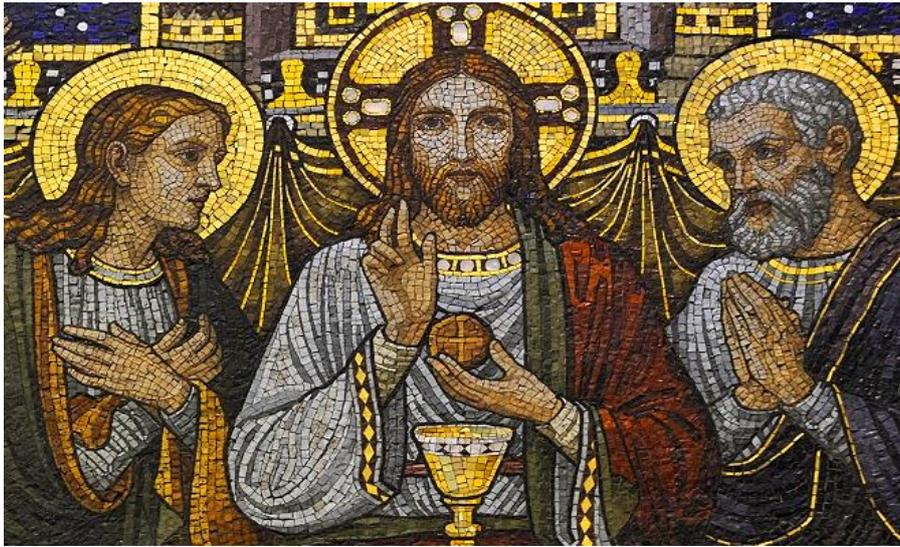


Thursday, 11th June, 2020

Corpus Christi: the Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of the Holy Communion



The one who eats this bread will live for ever.

Food and drink are not simply essential to the continuance of human life. They are a part of the cultural and artistic expression of what it is to be human in various parts of the world and in various generations.



When Basil Fawlty wished to insult his guests at Fawlty Towers in the episode called "Gourmet Night," he disrespectfully suggested that for some of them, it would be as well to serve just baked beans by throwing them on the floor and garnishing with a couple of dead dogs!

What we eat, how we prepare it and how we serve it are subtle and vital expressions of both our perceptions of ourselves and our relationships with others.

But it's not simple. To express welcome and honour for your guests, you set the dining room up with splendid things. You get out the best table ware, the best cutlery and glasses, and a smart tablecloth. You buy good food and wine and make sure that there is a wide choice of aperitifs and digestifs. You ensure that the room is warm enough or cool enough and put on clean clothes. You light candles and go to enormous pains to make the food look delightful and well as taste delightful.

But at another level, if you are invited to sit in the kitchen and share a make-shift meal, perhaps you have found a deeper level of relationship. And perhaps, in that most intimate meal, the left-overs from yesterday, you find a level at which the showy ceases to count and the real you is evident and open to scrutiny.

Just look at the books published about food, in the supermarkets and in the bookshops. Count all the television programmes about cooking and food which seem to proliferate every week.

Clearly, food and drink are more important than just eating. They are fundamental to our self-image and a vehicle for our reaching out to others with friendship, in business and of course, in religion.

Food and drink are closely associated with religion, as we hear in the bible readings for this festival. From Genesis, we heard of a celebratory feast of bread and wine, offered in thanksgiving for the success of Abram by Melchizedek, King and High priest. This is an archetypal celebration which is reflected in so many ways in our faith and in several other world faiths.

Then from 1 Corinthians, we hear Paul's recounting of the words of Institution from the Last Supper, and how this proclaims the death of the Lord until he comes, until the end of time. This narrative has informed the worship of Christian communities for 2000 years and still holds great power for the future.



An African scene of the Last Supper and the start of the tradition of taking bread and wine, or the Eucharist

Then in the Gospel reading, John 6:51-58, we hear that mysterious dialogue between Jesus and his detractors in which he invited his disciples to eat his flesh and then compares this favourably with the manna which fed the people of Israel in the wilderness. In this dangerous talk, we are invited to step over the threshold of faith and into a world in which the mystical feeding on the body and blood of Christ is inextricably bound up with real bread, real wine, creating for us Christians a huge seam of rich theology which is part of our celebration of the Eucharist week by week, day by day, and especially on the feast of Corpus Christi when we meet to show our appreciation and our reverence for the food which Jesus offers. Food for us, food for the world, food for thought, food for bodies, food for the spirit of humanity, food for the present, food for the future, food which is a foretaste of heaven, food which exhorts us to strain our sights upwards and seek the heavenly banquet.

On this day, with Christians everywhere, we celebrate the nourishing work of God in our lives and we celebrate the equality we all share before the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. This food is offered for you and me, but also for children and men and women in every place and in every age. It is a sign of the gift of God to the world, the gifts of creation, the gifts of our lives, the gifts we offer each other and the gifts we offer back to God in worship.

The one who eats this bread will live forever.