



The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ: 6th June 2021
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The cup of salvation I will raise; I will call on the Lord’s name.”

Westminster Cathedral is properly called the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The inscription over the main doorway reads “Domine Jesu Rex et Redemptor per Sanguinem Tuum Salva Nos”: Lord Jesus, King and Redeemer, save us through your Blood. When Pope Benedict XVI visited the Cathedral in 2010 he celebrated the Votive Mass of the Most Precious Blood. This used to be the Feast marked each year on 1st July, but in the new Missal it is subsumed into the Celebration of the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which used to be called, and still is sometimes “Corpus Christi”, the Body of Christ. Without going into too much detail Year B (this year) the first and second readings focus very much on the background to Jesus saying in the Gospel of St Mark “This is my blood, the blood of the Covenant which is to be poured out for many.”

These days (apart from the time of the Pandemic) we are more used to taking from the Chalice of the Precious Blood in the Eucharist, so we are more aware of the significance of that part of the Last Supper than in the days when we took the Sacred Host of unleavened Bread only.

In Old Testament times animal sacrifice was common place in religious rituals, and for the Jewish people, starting from the time of the blood of the Lamb being put on the doorpost at the Exodus and their miraculous escape from slavery, right through to the Passover meal where the Lamb was consumed in memory of that event; and the blood of animals sacrificed in the Temple being, offered to God, and sprinkled on the people; blood offering, in expiation for sin was the means to express sorrow for sin and to reconcile with God.

That is the background to the section from the Letter to the Hebrews this Sunday where we read: “how much more effectively the blood of Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God.”

The Feast of the Precious Blood obviously highlighted the significance of Our Lord’s death on the Cross, the pouring out of His blood for us, and the sacramental participation in that sacrifice. When Pope Emeritus Benedict preached in Westminster Cathedral he referred to the symbolism of the Cathedral’s massive Cross showing the “crushed” Christ on a red background. He said the Mystery of the Precious Blood illustrates the unity of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross and His eternal priesthood. Jesus’ blood, shed on the Cross, he explained, is “the source of the Church’s life.” And, he added, “and the Church obeys His command of ‘do this in memory of me’ until His return; through the Eucharist

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it “rejoice(s) in His sacramental presence and draw(s) upon the power of His saving grace for the redemption of the world.”

The Communion Antiphon for the Votive Mass of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ has these words from St Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians Chapter 10 Verse 16: “The Chalice of Blessing that we bless is a Communion in the Blood of Christ; and the bread that we break is a sharing in the Body of Christ.”

The Real Presence that we celebrate on this Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is spoken of by Father Joseph Pollard in his Homily for this Feast as a “fullness of presence that is truly unique and lacks nothing, on his part, of reality, intensity and intimacy. The only encounter with the Lord that outdoes the Eucharistic encounter will be our meeting together in heaven in the state of mutual glory. In our present pilgrim condition, the Eucharist is, quite simply, our summit meeting and His summit presence.”

We look forward to the day when - the Pandemic over – we can once more participate fully in this wondrous sacrament, that is truly food and drink for our journey to eternal glory.

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