



Corpus Christi and the Sacred Heart 2 & 7 June 2024
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“To return love for love”

As I write this Reflection on Thursday 30 May I am conscious that in Rome it is already the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, whereas here in England the celebration will take place on Sunday 2 June. One of the customs that will take place in Rome is the Procession with the Blessed Sacrament between the great Basilica of St Mary Major and the Cathedral Church of Rome, St John Lateran. It is a Procession led by the Pope himself, Francis. Here in England, depending on the local situation, Parishes mark the Solemnity too with a Procession, accompanied by a period of Adoration and Benediction. In Birmingham City Centre this year there will be Adoration, Procession and Benediction led by our Archbishop between St Michael’s Church and St Chad’s Cathedral.

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) is a Liturgical Solemnity celebrating the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We believe that Jesus is truly present to us in the elements of bread and wine as we recall the words of Jesus recorded by St Mark: ***“as they were eating he took the bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, ‘Take it’, he said ‘this is my body’. Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them, and all drank from it, and he said to them, ‘this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which will be poured out for many’.***

The Feast of Corpus Christi was proposed by St Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church, to Pope Clement IV, in order to create a feast focused solely on the Eucharist, emphasising the joy of the Eucharist being the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. We are familiar with the hymn composed by St Thomas in the 13th Century “Pange lingua gloriosi corporis mysterium”. It is often sung in English as the hymn “Of the Glorious Body Telling” to the same tune as the Latin. The last 2 stanzas (called, separately, Tantum ergo) are sung at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The hymn expresses the doctrine that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ during the celebration of the Eucharist.

Closely aligned with the practice of Procession with the Blessed Sacrament is Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Again, it is a sign of devotion and worship of Jesus Christ, who is present under the appearance of the consecrated host. The

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“Instruction on Eucharistic Worship” issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites on the Feast of Corpus Christi, 25 May 1967, reads *“The exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, for which a monstrance or a ciborium may be used, stimulates the faithful to the awareness of the marvellous presence of Christ and is an invitation to spiritual communion with Him. It is therefore an excellent encouragement to offer Him that worship in spirit and truth which is His due.”*

Speaking to a gathering in Phoenix Park, during his visit to Ireland in 1979 Pope St John Paul II said:

“The visit to the Blessed Sacrament is a great treasure of the Catholic Faith, nourishes social love and gives us opportunities for adoration and thanksgiving for reparation and supplication.”

The Solemnity of Corpus Christ leads us to the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was St John Henry Newman who said: *“O most Sacred, most loving Heart of Jesus, Thou art concealed in the Holy Eucharist, and Thou beatest for us still.”* This year marks the 350th Anniversary of the Apparitions to St Margaret Mary: it was while she was praying before the Blessed Sacrament that Jesus appeared to her. The first apparition was on December 27th 1673 (the Feast of St John the Apostle) and the 4th and ‘great apparition’ on June 27th 1675, the date of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart. A Jubilee lasting a year and a half is underway with the theme “To return love for love” for this great moment of pilgrimage, liturgies and meetings.

One of the things Jesus asked for when appearing to St Margaret Mary was *“reparation for the offences caused by sins of humanity”*. Pope Francis wrote to participants at a Symposium in Paray-le-Monial earlier this May saying, *“the beautiful practice of the Reparation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”* is an important practice for all the baptised, even if today it *“may be somewhat forgotten or wrongly judged obsolete”*. He said: *“Jesus asked St Mary Margaret for the act of reparation for the offences caused by the sins of humanity. If these acts consoled His heart, this means that reparation can also console the heart of every wounded person.”*

In the context of Jesus love for humanity, a love we in the Church experience especially in the Eucharist, we are ever more aware of the deep hurt caused to Him by the sin of a self-centred world. And in a Church where the crisis of abuse has come to the fore in recent times, the teaching on reparation opens up a path of hope and truth for the whole body.

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