

Reflecting
on the Body and Blood of Christ



Archdiocese of
Liverpool

Prepare to be attentive to *The God Who Speaks in this story.*



- Light a candle or tea light if possible.
- Perhaps place a flower from the garden next to the light.

Let us begin our time of prayer for Corpus Christi:

Breathe deeply and allow yourself to become still.

Let the music, *O sacrament most holy*, help you to relax. Ask for God's grace and light to fill your heart and your mind as you open to the Word.



O sacrament most holy,
O sacrament divine.
All praise and all thanksgiving be ev'ry moment thine.



Spend some time just looking at the three images.

- Where is your eye drawn to?
- What feelings are you experiencing?
- What are you noticing?



As today celebrates the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ we have a sequence.



Lo! The angel's food is given
To the pilgrim who has striven;
See the children's bread from heaven,
Which on dogs may not be spent,
Truth the ancient types fulfilling,
Isaac bound, a victim willing,
Paschal lamb, its lifeblood spilling,
Manna to the fathers sent.

Very bread, good shepherd, tend us,
Jesu, of your love befriend us,
You refresh us, you defend us,
Your eternal goodness send us
In the land of life to see.

You who all things can and know,
Who on earth such food bestow,
Grant us with your saints, though lowest,
Where the heavenly feast you show,
Fellow heirs and guests to be.
Amen. Alleluia.
Amen. Alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia. Alleluia, alleluia.
Alleluia, alleluia. Alleluia, alleluia.
I am the living bread that came down from heaven,
says the Lord;
Whoever eats this bread will live forever.
Alleluia, alleluia. Alleluia, alleluia.
Alleluia, alleluia. Alleluia, alleluia.

Now, either read slowly to yourself this short passage from the Gospel according to John or better still, read it aloud, again slowly.

From the Gospel according to John 6:51-58



Jesus said to the crowd, '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.'



The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' 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. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This 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.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Spend a few moments allowing some aspect of the Gospel – a word, phrase or image – to touch you more deeply and read this part a second time, aloud if possible.

Now move on to this week's reflection by Fr Chris Thomas of The Irenaeus Project...



When I was the University Chaplain in Liverpool we ran a drop-in centre for students. Because our building was right next to the Cathedral we used to get a lot of the street people wandering in looking for warmth and shelter. Student life can be very insular and petty, so the street people added a much-needed breadth to life and inspired several of the students to work in night shelters round the city.

One of the men who came regularly into the building was Tony. Tony was an alcoholic, a big genial Irish man with a sad tale to tell of rejection and abuse which had led him on to the streets. One day he walked shakily into the building at about 5pm and went into the toilet. After about ten minutes I followed him in to find him slumped in the corner. He was semi-conscious and obviously extremely ill. I called my assistant in and went for a blanket and a pillow and then called for an ambulance who diverted us to the police. When I went back to the toilet Nicky, my assistant, and I made Tony as comfortable as we could and sat with him. The police arrived and tried to bully Tony into standing up. He couldn't do it and in the end was crying so I asked the police to leave. They went into the lounge and waited. I sat down next to Tony. Nicky and I held his hands. He looked at us both and smiled and then died. I went out and told the police who had the grace to look embarrassed and then we sat with Tony until arrangements were made and his body removed. After

Tony had died, Nicky sat with the tears pouring down her face, and when Tony had been taken away and we were alone again she looked at me and said 'I've just seen Jesus.' It was for me a Gospel moment, a moment when I glimpsed the truth of the presence of God with us. It was like a flash of light. Here in this broken, battered body of a vulnerable, sad man was the presence of Christ.

One of the major themes in John's Gospel is that of blindness and sight. All the time we're invited to look beyond what we see with our physical eyes and recognise the presence of God who has chosen to be intimately involved with creation, so much so that every aspect of this world is charged with the grandeur of God. There is no division between the sacred and the secular. God is in it all and everything is made holy by the presence of God. Look at everything and everybody with fresh eyes and see the presence of the living Lord.

It's that intimacy that is communicated to us in bread and wine, but not just in bread and wine. Jesus tries to show the people that only by feeding on him will they really experience new life and enter into true intimacy. Only by feeding on him and opening our hearts to him will we be able to recognise the truth of the presence of God everywhere. I am the bread of life. Eat my body, drink my blood. This was a scandal to those who couldn't see beyond. He was inviting them to enter into life. They saw him as preaching something that was forbidden to them from the book of the Leviticus and agreeing to cannibalism and so they said that it was intolerable language. At the end of the chapter on the bread of life, we find it is decision time. People can either go all the way with Peter, the symbol here of the Church, who knows where life is to be found, or walk away into the darkness of unbelief.

I suppose the question for us to ask ourselves, on this feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, is whether or not we're prepared to feed on Jesus, enter into intimacy with him, and look at the world with new eyes, seeing the presence of God in all things or whether we'll refuse to see and recognise and know the truth that God is with us in the very stuff of our lives.

Take a few moments to receive and reflect on this poem, *Street Corner Christ*, by Patrick Kavanagh.



I saw Christ today
At a street corner stand,
In the rags of a beggar he stood
He held ballads in his hand.

He was crying out: "Two for a penny
Will anyone buy
The finest ballads ever made
From the stuff of joy?"

But the blind and deaf went past
Knowing only there
An uncouth ballad seller
With tail-matted hair.



As a result of your reflection, offer some prayers of intercession for the people and situations in our world today that seem to you to be most in need.

Let's begin with the prayer Archbishop Malcolm has asked us to pray at this time and then you may like to include one or more of prayers that follow and/or add your own:



God Our Father,
each person is precious to You.
You are the Giver of life.

Have mercy on us and protect us at this time,
as the coronavirus threatens health and life.
You are an ever-present Helper in time of trouble.
Watch over those who are suffering,
give strength to those who are aiding the sick
and give courage to all in this time of anxiety.
We ask this of you in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ.
Amen.

We pray for the Church – the body of Christ on earth today and especially for all who lead and serve within it – that they may be always closely united to Christ.

We pray for those families who have been making the With You Always journey towards First Holy Communion around this time. May they experience the closeness of Christ and be encouraged to talk about their faith as they await our return to our parish church buildings.

We pray for our schoolchildren across all years as more schools are re-opened. We ask for the Lord's blessing especially on those who will make the transitions from school to college, employment, or university, that they will find hope and encouragement for their future.

We pray for all who care for the sick and dying, the elderly and the vulnerable , that they may have the resources they need to be able to fulfil their role with kindness and compassion.

We pray for the work of our diocesan Synod, that our community will wisely discern where the Holy Spirit is leading us during the coming months.

We pray now in the words Jesus gave us:

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

To end your time of reflection, listen to *Bread of Life*.



*Bread of life, truth eternal,
Broken now to set us free.
The risen Christ, his saving power,
Is here in Bread and Wine for me.*

Lord, I know I am not worthy to receive you.
You speak the words and I am healed.
Here at your table, Love's mystery:
One bread, one cup, one family.

Lord by your cross, you reconciled us to the Father.
We have only to believe.
Your sacrifice, our victory,
Now by your blood we are redeemed.

Lord, you gave your people manna in the desert,
Still you fulfil our every need.
Lord when we hunger, Lord, when we thirst,
We come to you and we receive.

Acknowledgements

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Images on page 3 (top to bottom): photograph by Sean Murphy; A family catechesis session in preparation for First Holy Communion: image from *With You Always Liverpool Resource*; Catholics waiting to receive the Body and Blood of Christ beneath the tapestries of modern day saints created by John Nava in The Cathedral of Our Lady and the Angels, Los Angeles.

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Street Corner Christ: Patrick Kavanagh *The Complete Poems*, The Goldsmith Press, 1972.

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