

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

PASTORAL LETTER

for the 6th June 2021

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This great Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ - Corpus Christi - calls us to reflect on the Lord's gift of Himself in the Eucharist. This celebration is "the heart and summit of the Church's life."¹ It is the greatest prayer, the highest action possible, for "Christ Himself, acting through the ministry of the priests, offered the Eucharistic sacrifice."² The Lord is truly present, sacramentally, and we are called to share in the gift of His Body and Blood. Through our sharing in Him, so we become ever closer to Him and to each other in the life and mission to which He has called us. The prayer of the Eucharist goes beyond our understanding and its impact on the life of the world will be greater than we can ever comprehend.

In the Eucharist, the Lord calls us to "share in his divinity, as he humbled Himself to share in our humanity."³ This is the great moment of conformity to Christ. The closeness that we have with Him through the Eucharist enables us to be the disciples He calls us to be; our Mission as His Church becomes possible. Let us pray and prepare ourselves that nothing would ever stand in the way of our openness to the gift and grace of the Eucharist.

During this last year, it has not always been possible for us to gather for the celebration of Mass. There were times, in the early months of the pandemic, when the priest celebrated alone in the Church. Knowing that the Eucharist was being celebrated in those times was a source of blessing and the live-streaming of the Liturgy enabled great numbers of people to join the celebration remotely. This has been a gift and will continue to be so for those who are infirm and housebound. However, sharing 'virtually' in the celebration that is at the very heart of our lives will never be the ideal. We are remote from our brothers and sisters in our parish communities and while the Spiritual Communion brings many graces, the participation in the celebration of Mass is the source of our lives.

On this Corpus Christi Day, therefore, I offer a deliberate invitation to return to the public celebration of Mass. Come once more to be with your sisters and brothers, gathered around the altar to meet with the Crucified and Risen Lord, truly present in the gift of the Sacrament.

¹ CCC, n.1407.

² CCC, n.1410.

³ THE ROMAN MISSAL, Offertory Prayers.

I call on you to extend this invitation to those whom you know who have not yet returned to the parish community. Extend this invitation to those who have found themselves searching for God during this time of pandemic, for we are at a moment of evangelisation: the Lord calls us to action.

The experience of the last year, with its many deep sufferings, calls us to rely on the One who brings us healing and wholeness - a healing and wholeness that we find in the Eucharist. "No other Sacrament" St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us, "has greater healing power."⁴ In the Eucharist, there is healing for ourselves, for our communities, for the world.

The Eucharist is a gift so amazing that our faltering human language cannot grasp its wonder. The Lord gives us His very Self as the food for our pilgrimage of life. It is the Lord who sustains us, not simply as individuals but as a community, for the work He has given us to do. Our present circumstances call us to remain faithful to this greatest of all celebrations, for the Eucharist is the source from which our lives are fulfilled. It is the moment from which the Lord sends us out on the Mission to which He has called us. How can we stay away?

With every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Richard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a cross at the beginning.

⁴ St. THOMAS AQUINAS, On the Feast of Corpus Christi.