



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
appointed to be read
in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
on 6th June 2021, the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

AN INVITATION

My dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

I am writing to you with an invitation. But let me first wish you today a very happy Feastday, Corpus Christi, when we adore the most precious treasure Christ has given His Church,¹ the Gift that exceeds all praise,² the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood. It is a sublime mystery, before which we can but kneel in silent astonishment - to borrow Charles Wesley's words - "lost in wonder, awe and praise."³ Today we return to Holy Thursday, to the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist and the priesthood that perpetuates the Mass until the end of time. My brothers and sisters, on our altars, it is the same Jesus Whom St. Thomas acclaimed "My Lord and my God," and of Whom St. John, the beloved disciple, seeing Him on the beach and hearing His voice, said excitedly: "It is the Lord!"⁴ In every Mass, Jesus actually speaks His Word to us in the Scriptures and then, as the bread and wine is changed into His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity,⁵ He gives us the gift of Himself, the Bread of Life, a love-gift that is stronger even than death.⁶

These last eighteen months, for all of us, have been difficult. The pandemic has brought much suffering, anxiety and disruption. It has also disrupted our spiritual and ecclesial life. We have often been unable to get to Mass or Confession, and the first sacraments for our children have had to be postponed. Yet valiant efforts have been made, with live-streaming and other initiatives, and I thank all of you, clergy and people, for your witness, self-sacrifice and service. The situation is presently looking more hopeful, so let us continue to pray to the Good Lord for a final resolution of this crisis.

With things improving, I come to you with an invitation. I wish to invite you to join me, and everyone across the Diocese, in keeping from today a Year of the Eucharist, supported by our current focus on St. Joseph. I wish this Year of the Eucharist to bring about a deep spiritual renewal, a deeper love for Jesus in the Mass and in the Sacrament of the Altar. I invite you to return physically to Mass, if you haven't already, and to attend Mass more often, keeping the feastsdays. I also invite you to pay visits to church – why not go as a family? – to bask in the Real Presence and to receive the peace of heart, liberation and gifts of love He offers.⁷ How you keep this Year is up to you, but I ask that periods of Eucharistic Adoration be organised and for everyone to undertake prayer and *lectio divina*. I have established five shrine churches: Portsmouth Cathedral, Sacred Heart Bournemouth, St. James's Reading, Jersey St. Thomas and Guernsey St. Joseph, where you can go on pilgrimage and gain an Indulgence. I also hope this Year will help us to link better liturgy and life, so that the more we love Jesus in the Eucharist, the more we will love Him in the needy and in creation. After all, Mary and Joseph cared for Jesus's practical needs every day. Our diocesan patron St. Edmund of Abingdon was noted for his works of charity; he often gave away his fees.⁸ And Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, patron of our youth, who from the age of 13 was a daily communicant, said: "*Jesus pays me a visit every morning in Communion and I repay Him, in the little way I can, by going to going to visit His poor.*"⁹

Let me share with you two major concerns I have, for which I ask you to pray. Nine out of ten Catholics do not attend Sunday Mass: how can we fan their faith into a flame? Ninety-nine per cent of people living in our Diocese do not know about the 'Bread of angels':¹⁰ how can we reach out to make them more welcome? Remember: when we kneel before the Lord in the Eucharist, we adore not only a Sacred Object but a Sacred Person, Jesus Himself.¹¹ More, Jesus is not just present: He is active. From the altar, He wants to fill us with His Holy Spirit.¹² He wants our hearts to burn within us. He wants to set us on fire with love, enthusiasm and passion. So when you adore Him, ask Him for the Holy Spirit; ask Him for the gifts of the Spirit; ask Him for the Holy Spirit to send you out to help transform the world with justice, love and peace.¹³

Another point. The Mass primarily is not about us; it's about God. It's not about what *we* do, but about what *God* does. It's not about worship or warm feelings; it's the work of the Blessed Trinity.¹⁴ When we come to Mass, the Holy Spirit unites us with Jesus in His self-offering to the Father, and just as, out of love for us, He lays down His life on the altar, so He sends us out to do the same for others.¹⁵ People often have vague, even wrong ideas about the Mass. The Mass is the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary in which He is the Victim.¹⁶ Jesus invites us to join ourselves to His sacrifice and to offer up to the Father our own lives, our thoughts, words and deeds, our sufferings, joys, hopes and fears.¹⁷ This is why the Mass is the source and centre of our Christian life.¹⁸ I hope that during the Year of the Eucharist, there will be many opportunities, online and in your parish, for catechesis and for sharing personal testimonies.

Let me end with a story. My parents died a little while ago: please pray for them. But occasionally during Eucharistic adoration I have had from the Lord a holy intuition that they are now with Him in that state of "refreshment, light and peace" the First Eucharistic Prayer speaks of. We are never closer to our departed loved ones than when we are with Jesus in the Eucharist: they are

with Him and He is with us.¹⁹ Indeed, the Eucharist creates the Church across space and time; it makes us one body, one spirit in Christ;²⁰ it generates our parish communities, the Lord uniting us with Himself and with one another in the bond of charity. It is sad that often in the Catholic Church, that within our Diocese, parishes, schools and families, there is a lack of love, a failure to practice the Lord's command: "Love one another as I have loved you."²¹ This leads to a culture of disunity, disaffection and fault-finding.²² Let us earnestly pray that this Year of the Eucharist will cause a new cascade of love across the Church, uniting us all in common purpose: Bishop, clergy and laity, husbands, wives and children. In this way, the Church in our Diocese will be more like what she is meant to be: a light, a *lumen gentium*, a light to everyone around.

Thank you for listening. I know I have said a lot here, so please do take a copy away with you to read at home. Meanwhile, let us pray for one another. And today, have a happy Feastday!

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth

¹ St. John Paul II *Homily on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, Thursday 14th June 2001*: http://www.vaican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010614_corpusdomini.html (June 2021)

² *Quantum potes, tantum aude, quia major omni laude, nec laudare sufficis* ('Dare all thou canst, thou hast no song worthy his praises to prolong, so far surpassing powers like thine'): Sequence of Corpus Christi.

³ Charles Wesley 'Love Divine all loves excelling' in *Hymns for those that Seek, and those that Have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus* (Bristol, Powell: 1747). One of my all-time favourite Catholic hymns to the Eucharist is 'O Bread of Heaven' written by St. Alphonsus Liguori (d. 1787). I rejoice in the simple and deep faith it expresses in the Real Presence: "... beneath this veil, Thou dost my very God conceal; My Jesus, dearest Treasure, hail! I love Thee, and adoring kneel." I find the last verse a moving prayer: "Beloved Lord, in Heaven above, there, Jesus, Thou awaitest me. To gaze on Thee with changeless love: yes, thus I hope, thus shall it be. For how can He deny me heaven, Who here on earth Himself hath given?"

⁴ John 20: 28 and 21: 7

⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1373-1381

⁶ Benedict XVI *Homily on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, Thursday 23rd June 2011*:

http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110623_corpusdomini.html (June 2021)

⁷ "The worship due to the sacrament of the Eucharist, whether during the celebration of the Mass or outside it, is the worship of *latría*, that is, the adoration given to God alone. The Church guards with the greatest care Hosts that have been consecrated. She brings them to the sick and to other persons who find it impossible to participate at Mass. She also presents them for the solemn adoration of the faithful and she bears them in processions. The Church encourages the faithful to make frequent visits to adore the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle" *Compendium of the Catechism* 286.

⁸ See C. H. Lawrence *St. Edmund of Abingdon: A Study in Hagiography and History* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1960)

⁹ "Gesu mi fa visita con la Comunione ogni mattina ed io gliela restituisco nel modo misero che posso: visitando i suoi poveri" L. Frassati *Mio Fratello Pier Giorgio: La Carita* (Torino, Effata Editrice: 2013) 25.

¹⁰ *Panis angelicus* ('the angelic Bread') is a phrase from the hymn *Sacris solemnibus* written by St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. It is appointed for use at the Office of Readings. The phrase also appears in the Sequence of the Mass: *ecce panis angelorum* ('behold, the Bread of Angels').

¹¹ See *Compendium of the Catechism* 282.

¹² I invite you to read through all the prayers of the Mass at home in a Missal and every time you see the word 'Lord' to ask yourself which Person of the Blessed Trinity is being addressed: it the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit?

¹³ "For you anointed your Only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, with the oil of gladness as eternal Priest and King of all creation, so that, by offering himself on the altar of the Cross as a spotless sacrifice to bring us peace, he might accomplish the mysteries of human redemption and, making all created thing subject to his rule, he might present to the immensity of your majesty an eternal and universal kingdom, a

kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace” *Roman Missal: Preface of Christ the King*

¹⁴ “.. through the liturgy, [Christ] is manifesting and making present and communicating to every time and place his work of salvation accomplished in one time and place.” See Abbot Jeremy Driscoll ‘The Liturgy: Work of the Holy Trinity’ *Church Life Journal: A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life* (July 18th 2016): <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-liturgy-work-of-the-holy-trinity/> (June 2021).

¹⁵ The liturgy of course does have a dual dimension of the Father’s blessings and our response. “The Church never ceases to present to the Father the offering of his own gifts and to beg him to send the Holy Spirit upon that offering, upon herself, upon the faithful, and upon the whole world, so that through communion in the death and resurrection of Christ the Priest, and by the power of the Spirit, these divine blessings will bring forth the fruits of life ‘to the praise of his glorious grace” (*Catechism* 1083). The point I wish to make here is that the Liturgy is about much more than what we feel or the hymns, prayers and readings we choose.

¹⁶ “The Eucharist is a *memorial* in the sense that it makes present and actual the sacrifice which Christ offered to the Father on the cross, once and for all on behalf of mankind. The sacrificial character of the Holy Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution, “This is my Body which is given for you” and “This cup is the New Covenant in my Blood that will be shed for you” (Luke 22:19-20). The sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one and the same sacrifice*. The priest and the victim are the same; only the manner of offering is different: in a bloody manner on the cross, in an unbloody manner in the Eucharist” *Compendium of the Catechism* 280.

¹⁷ See *Compendium of the Catechism* 281.

¹⁸ Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (Vatican: 1973) General Introduction 1.1: <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/HCW/HCWE-Introduction.pdf> (June 2021). Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 6.

¹⁹ “It is no coincidence that in the ancient church people were buried in gardens surrounding a sacred building, as if to say that, in some way, the hosts of those who have preceded us participate in every Eucharist. Our parents and grandparents are there, our godfathers and godmothers are there, our catechists and other teachers are there...” Pope Francis *General Audience 7th April 2021*: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210407_udienza-generale.html (June 2021).

²⁰ As we pray in Eucharistic Prayer IV: “Look, O Lord, upon the sacrifice which you yourself have provided for your Church, and grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory”.

²¹ John 13: 34

²² Cf. *Philippians* 2: 14-16