

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)

14 June 2020



Collect

O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament
have left us a memorial of your Passion,
grant us, we pray,
so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood
that we may always experience in ourselves
the fruits of your redemption.
Who live and reign with God the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Readings and Commentaries

As if the Church were not satisfied with fifty days of paschal feasting, the festivals continue beyond the season. First the Holy Trinity is honoured, and now the Body and Blood of Christ. Many still know today's feast by its shorter Latin name, Corpus Christi.

This observance originated in the Belgian city of Liège in the 13th century. Very soon after, in 1264, Pope Urban IV decreed that the feast be celebrated by the whole Western Church. From then until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council the popular focus of the feast was on the presence of Christ in the consecrated bread, the Blessed Sacrament.

Nowadays the feast invites us to enter into the whole mystery of Jesus' self-gift to us in the eucharistic meal. We are reminded that the eucharist is first and foremost an action that engages us heart and soul. Our communion in the Body and Blood of Christ makes the Church the Body of Christ. Like Jesus we break the bread and pour out the wine of our lives for the sake of the world.

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy
8:2–3, 14–16

Moses said to the people: ‘Remember how the Lord your God led you for forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, to test you and know your inmost heart – whether you would keep his commandments or not. He humbled you, he made you feel hunger, he fed you with manna which neither you nor your fathers had known, to make you understand that man does not live on bread alone but that man lives on everything that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

‘Do not then forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery: who guided you through this vast and dreadful wilderness, a land of fiery serpents, scorpions, thirst; who in this waterless place brought you water from the hardest rock; who in this wilderness fed you with manna that your fathers had not known.’

First Reading

The name of the book of Deuteronomy gives us the key to its purpose. “Deuteronomy” means “second law-giving”. The book of Deuteronomy revisits the contents of the first four books of the Bible and re-presents the whole teaching of Moses. By recalling and interpreting all that had happened to bring Israel to the Promised Land, Moses lays the foundation for Israel’s future way of life there.

The whole of chapter 8, from which today’s text is taken, is worth reading in full. Moses’ message is clear. He wants the Israelites to remember – to never forget – everything that God had done for them. He warns them plainly of the danger they face. Once they are established in their new homeland and are enjoying peace and prosperity, they run the risk of imagining they have achieved this by their own efforts. They may well lose sight of the God who has saved them.

Today’s excerpt focuses on the gift of manna, the food God gave them on their way through the desert. This anticipates Jesus’ reference to “the bread our ancestors ate” in the gospel that follows. The form of the reading is that of an exhortation. Moses is in the business of persuasion here, and this should be reflected in the way the reading is proclaimed. In the end it is a positive message. Readers need to take care that the overall tone they adopt is inviting rather than moralising or accusing. There is nothing in the reading that should pose any particular difficulty.

Reader and congregation alike will recognise in this passage Jesus’ reply when Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread: “Man does not live on bread alone but . . . on everything that comes from the mouth of the Lord”. The NRSV renders this text in inclusive language.

Responsorial Psalm **Ps 147:12–15, 19–20**

R. Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.

or

R. Alleluia.

O praise the Lord, Jerusalem!
Zion, praise your God!

He has strengthened the bars of your gates,
he has blessed the children within you. **R.**

He established peace on your borders,
he feeds you with finest wheat.

He sends out his word to the earth
and swiftly runs his command. **R.**

He makes his word known to Jacob,
to Israel his laws and decrees.

He has not dealt thus with other nations;
he has not taught them his decrees. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

The response and verses for the responsorial psalm come from the third and final section of Psalm 147. The city of Jerusalem, built on Mount Zion, is called to praise God on behalf of the whole nation.

Praise is due because God keeps the city safe: “He has strengthened the bars of your gates . . . and established peace on your borders”. God has also provided food for body (“finest wheat) and soul (“his word . . . his laws and decrees”) and blessed the city with children.

Of all these blessings, today we are especially mindful of the nourishment God gives – the “manna” of old and the “living bread” that is the new gift of Jesus. Clearly the reader’s task is to communicate the happiness and gratitude of God’s people.

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians

10:16–17

The blessing-cup that we bless is a communion with the blood of Christ, and the bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 6:51–58

Jesus said to the Jews:

‘I am the living bread which has come down from heaven.

Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever;
and the bread that I shall give
is my flesh, for the life of the world.’

Then the Jews started arguing with one another:
‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ they said.
Jesus replied:

‘I tell you most solemnly,
if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink his blood,
you will not have life in you.
Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my
blood
has eternal life,
and I shall raise him up on the last day.
For my flesh is real food
and my blood is real drink.
He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood
lives in me
and I live in him.
As I, who am sent by the living Father,
myself draw life from the Father,
so whoever eats me will draw life from me.
This is the bread come down from heaven;
not like the bread our ancestors ate:
they are dead,
but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.’

Second Reading

To unearth the background to this very short text from chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians we have to go back to the beginning of chapter 8 – an exercise that is highly recommended. A problem has arisen in the community as to whether Christians are free to eat food left over from pagan sacrificial rites or to share meals with pagans.

Paul takes some time to explore the issue, allowing himself to be drawn in different directions along the way. Essentially he concludes that Christians are free to eat whatever they like, but should only do so if it would give no offense to those whose consciences are weak.

It occurs to him that those who offer sacrifice to idols, then eat this food, feel bonded to the idol (or to “demons” as Paul goes on to say). In contrast, when Christians eat and drink at the Lord’s table they are in communion with Christ. This prompts Paul to add that sharing in the one loaf of bread makes everyone “a single body”. The Lord’s Supper brings us into communion both with Christ and with one another. Being such a short reading this text should be read rather slowly and thoughtfully. The reference to both the “blessing-cup” and the “bread that we break” is a timely reminder of the fact that Jesus continues to invite us to commune in both his body and his blood. Sadly, communion under both kinds is still far from the norm at Sunday Mass.

Gospel

As we saw on Holy Thursday night, the gospel of John does not record the Last Supper as the other gospels do. Instead of describing the meal, John tells how Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. This does not mean that John’s gospel has nothing to say about what we now call the eucharist. In fact John devotes quite a lot of space to this topic, indeed a whole chapter. But he does it much earlier in the gospel, in chapter 6, and this is what we hear from today.

The chapter begins with the feeding of the five thousand with two fish and five barley loaves. This evocative sign provokes questioning from the crowd. In response Jesus promises them “living bread” by which he seems to mean his teaching, his wisdom. As the exchange between Jesus and the crowd grows more intense, Jesus begins to identify this living bread with his flesh, given “for the life of the world”. More provocatively still, he insists that eating “the flesh of the Son of Man” and drinking “his blood” is the only way to find life. And the life that this will bring is “eternal life”. It is this section of the chapter that has been selected for today. We do not go on to hear how these challenging words led to a parting of the ways between Jesus and many of his disciples. The effect of this omission means that we focus on the positive promise Jesus makes.

Having connected with what the second reading has to say about the body and blood of Christ, the gospel concludes with a reference back to the gift of the manna in the first reading. The bread Jesus gives is “not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever”.

Concluding Prayers

Almighty and all-merciful God,
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,
in whom there is no shadow of death,
save us in this time of crisis;
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;
watch over all medical people
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,
that hope may never die
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,
may shine upon us and the whole world.
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Holy Mary, health of the sick, pray for us.
St Joseph, guardian of us all, pray for us.

(Most Rev. Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane)

or

Gracious God,
We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.
We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.
We pray for those in need of healing.
We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.
We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain
all those who are serving in response.
We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment
amidst the many choices and decisions
facing our national, community and medical leaders.
We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do
to help those who are vulnerable.
This prayer for our nation in the family of nations,
with all that is on our hearts,
we gather now and pray
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Ecumenical prayer from the National Council of Churches. We have been invited to pray this prayer at 7pm each day.)