

St Peter's, Mount Park Road, Ealing
Corpus Christi
Thursday 4th June 2015
We are the body of Christ

Most Sundays through out the year we assent to the words spoken on our behalf by the president of the Eucharist, "We are the body of Christ", the physical outworking of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit representative, or many would say more than just representative of the physical reality of Jesus amongst his people. A statement that claims a level of existence that outstrips anything else we can evoke, the place of the risen and ascended lord in the world he came to save, it is a statement that claims the status of the baptised community of the faithful in a world that has been saved by the body and blood of the Son of God, that has yet to receive him as his own. This is a statement that rolls off the tongue that would profoundly change our existence if we were to truly accept its meaning for us, "We are the body of Christ".

This is a profound declaration we can casually give voice to but if we stopped for a moment and seriously considered it we might quake in our boots. To be the body of Christ must have consequences. The chief one being to place the continuing ministry of Jesus in the hands of the priesthood of all believers. The phrase does not mean "we are the body of Christ but that doesn't mean we have the full responsibility of being his representatives on earth...we give that to someone else". Instead it emphasises our baptismal vows of service, prayer and proclamation. That we have the joy of proclaiming the good news of Jesus which brought the truth of salvation to the world. And what a joy it should be. Jesus has saved us from sin and death through our baptism and our witness to his love in our lives. To proclaim this must be a sign and seal of love and devotion.

It is no accident that Corpus Christi has been called the celebration of the people. The mass, often hijacked by the clerics is here proclaimed as the worship of the people. The Blessed Sacrament is returned to the people in celebration and proclamation. A service begun in the church in 1347 rapidly became a great celebration amongst the community, drawing in artisans, peasants and businessmen to festivities celebrating the place of God amongst his people, celebrating the centrality of the sacrament to the life of the faith and the gift given by Jesus, not just as a memorial but also an empowerment of his followers to proclaim him as the living God. Within a couple of years of its inception so firmly grasped was the vision of the festival that it had spread far and wide and developed into very elaborate and wonderful festivals.

Corpus Christi and Benediction have often been referred to as 'illegal cookie worship'. Half tongue in cheek admittedly, but also a phrase that misunderstands the place of this festival. The bread of the Eucharist, the sacrament of Holy Communion is the ultimate statement of our relationship to each other and to God. This is the body of Christ. This is us, not as ordinary human beings pottering around the planet doing our own thing. This is us as God sees us and God wants us to live, together. Our condition in this is recognised in the brokenness of the bread. In sharing the bread amongst us it has to be broken, incomplete as we are in the world. As individuals and as a community we are imperfect yet aim towards perfection in Christ. This service, this focus on the sacrament of the mass reminds us of the truly holy status God confers on us in the cross and the empty tomb, in the salvation that he brings through his son our saviour. That status Jesus invokes at the last supper as he washes his disciples' feet and feeds them with the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

Today in this service we invoke the biblical truth of God's saving love that has been expressed throughout the ages; from Moses and the manna given from heaven to Jesus and the Emmaus road, to the lives of the saints and the words of Paul; a truth that has spoken to every age throughout the ages; that we are the children of God, not an enclosed, select sect that has the secret of salvation, but a people called to share the love of God throughout the whole earth, in every corner, sharing the bread and wine that proclaim the love of God to all his people, to the whole of creation.

We also invoke the centrality of the sacrament in understanding ourselves. Who we are and what we are doing in this world. That we are not lone islands drifting through a life full of tears and woes. That we are one even as Christ is one with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. That we are who we are because of the Good Friday and Easter Morning events. That we are made whole and more than whole by the place of God in our lives. That we are healed and made new in our baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This meal, the shared engagement with the sacrament, this communion at the altar is what makes us who we are; makes us whole and new in God's presence.

All of this we bring together at this Mass. As we break bread here together; as we share the common cup at this table we are that Body made tangible in the bread that proclaims the blessing of God to the world, the blessing given to everyone in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the true bread broken for us.