

## Corpus Christi. John 6.51-58

Corpus Christi - the title that the Lectionary gives today's feast: thanksgiving for the institution of Holy Communion, seems deliberately low-key, part of the effort to retain catholic tradition and distance ourselves from it all at the same time.

Nonetheless it is an opportunity for us to appreciate the gift of this sacrament - all the more important because it seems as if for many it has lost its special grace of joining ourselves to our Lord and our God and being renewed with the gift of his life.

[I'm struck today by how like the Trinity it has three elements which all go together.] Firstly there is the gift of the sacrament, something we do in obedience to our Lord's command: Do this in remembrance of me, and in which, by which, our remembering unites us with him and with our fellow disciples. But this obedient response of ours is like the proverbial stone thrown into a pool, this remembering ripples out, recalling the whole of our Lord's life, all he said and did. Perhaps we remember too our first encounters with him through Bible stories, hymns that touched our hearts.... And recall also something of where we are in our lives that we bring before him today. It is this moment of our lives, and the life we share with others, that we offer to him and at this moment receive his words and his gift of himself. And at some point we look ahead to what's to come, and to do, tasks or problems or delights that we face with renewed vision and energy as we are fed by his words, by the gift of himself to us . . .

How fitting to give thanks for this gift. When this festival of Corpus Christi developed it was also a celebration of human fellowships, particularly through the trade guilds of the late middle ages. x Their legacy is in the livery companies of the City of London and in the mystery plays that originated in this festi-

val, a nice example of bottom-up initiative. And all the different trades came together to celebrate the wonderful stories that climaxed in the redeeming work of Christ. It's natural to be wistful for such times and places when whole communities were united in this way.

These recent months and weeks we have been vividly reminded of that secular fellowship that bears the marks of the Christian imagination, the NHS and bears those marks particularly in the self-sacrifice that has in deed led many staff to lose their own lives as they have sought to save the lives of others. The backdrop of course has been the havoc caused by the virus covid-19 and the ravages of which continue to harm our society on many levels.

At least as shocking have been the signs that mark and disfigure the body of society, with the disproportionate number of black and ethnic minority deaths from the virus and then the shocking murder of George Floyd in America and the many protests that remind us that such hatred and violence blight the lives of many in our country too. Such violence is extreme but an extreme version of what? Is it not of something we all are caught up in to some extent, that resistance to whatever challenges or calls into question our particular personal hold on life, our position or identity . . .? Recently I read Andrea Levy's novel "Small Island", you may have seen the tv drama on Monday about the Windrush scandal. Both show us how closely our white lives are entwined with those black ones.

But Andrea Levy's novel showed the same dynamics of prejudice and violence existing within white British society, where the way to assert oneself was by doing down or excluding some other group or persons. Its uncomfortable and sobering to see, through such presentations, one's own involvement in such reactions and processes. It increases my respect and gratitude for those who, like our Lord called out such behaviour and show a different way of living together. This sacrament of Christ's life and death, his body and blood, witnesses to and invites our participation in a new social order in which violence and domination is renounced and shown not to be the way of the Lord. & Whose prophet said

to the Lord's people, "My ways are not your ways" and who promised to take away our hearts of stone.

So participating in this act of remembering, we are called to recognise and relinquish our own wishes to control, exploit, exclude for our own acquisitive instincts and to lay down our burdens and receive this invitation to be part of his body by receiving his gift of new life.

And how can our celebration today not be bitter-sweet, with the events I've referred to and also the sadness of not being able to meet in the flesh at his table. If by his wounds we are healed, may we, by this bitter-sweet meeting, and not quite meeting, enter into the sacrifice of his love and life and bring that same love, not ours but his, into all the corners of the world starting with those in which we move.