

PASTORAL LETTER

FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

10 JUNE 2012

ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Today the Church is celebrating one of the most beautiful feasts of the whole year – the feast of Corpus Christi. On this day, we give thanks for the extraordinary gift Jesus makes of Himself in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. It is through our Holy Communion with Him and with each other that the Church has its existence. No wonder the Bishops at the Second Vatican Council said that the Eucharist is the summit of the activity of the church. It is also the source from which all its power flows. Put in other words “The Eucharist makes the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist”.

Catholics have always had an extraordinary devotion to the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. This feast of Corpus Christi became universal in 1264; that is the year Pope Urban IV responded both to popular devotion and the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, and decreed that there should be public proclamations of our faith in this mystery. Prayer, processions and adoration are all part of the honour we give to the Blessed Sacrament.

The sacramental presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is a focal point in our churches. Its sheer wonder claims our reverence. This is just one reason why we genuflect to the tabernacle on entering a Catholic church. Yet the Eucharist does not exist simply to be observed in a passive way. The abiding presence of Jesus in our midst is a dynamic one. In celebrating the Mass, in receiving the Holy Communion, in adoring the Blessed Sacrament, we are

literally “giving thanks”. The many different descriptions we give to this mystery are an indication of the depth of its meaning.

When the Bishops of the Catholic Church met at the Second Vatican Council fifty years ago they said of the Eucharist:

“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is received, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us”.

Another name for the Eucharist is Viaticum “Food for the Journey”. This is perhaps best known when the Blessed Sacrament is brought to a person who is dying. But the “Bread of Life” which we receive regularly in Holy Communion is our nourishment for the daily journey of life in faith which each of us has to make. As Catholics, we come together Sunday by Sunday as members of God’s pilgrim people in the footsteps of Abraham, our father in faith. That is one reason why pilgrimage is so important in our Catholic life. The journey to a holy place, made together, is a sign of an inward journey which we make towards that union we share with God in this life and the next. The processions and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament which will take place today both in the grounds of Cardiff Castle and at Llantarnam Abbey will be public expressions of the pilgrimage of faith which we all make together.

Early next week a group of pilgrims from the Archdiocese will travel to Dublin to participate in the fiftieth International Eucharistic Congress. People from all over the world will gather to proclaim their universal faith in the Eucharist and pray for the reconciliation, healing and forgiveness which are also at the heart of the Eucharist. The Cardiff pilgrims will express solidarity and

communion with the Catholics of Ireland and acknowledge the debt owed by the church in Wales and throughout the world for the heritage of the Catholic faith shared over many generations by the people of Ireland.

None of us can fail to notice the decline in church attendance experienced by all denominations in Wales and England, and beyond, in recent years. Successive Popes have emphasised that Evangelisation is part of the identity of the Church. Concern for non church going Catholics must be part of the outreach we make during the Year of Faith called by Pope Benedict XVI. This will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. The “Year of Faith” will begin in October. To respond to our responsibility to reach out in new ways, a one day conference called “Crossing the Threshold” will be held in Cardiff on 23 June.

It will explore ways in which we as a Church can create an environment in which non church going Catholics can be welcomed to a renewed understanding of their faith. This is essential if we are to take the Evangelisation, of which Pope Benedict speaks, seriously. If the Eucharist is, indeed, the “source and summit” of the life of the Church, it is our duty to ensure that the Bread of Life is shared with all who have need of it.

What better day to begin afresh than on this feast of Corpus Christi?

Yours devotedly,

+George Stack

Archbishop of Cardiff