

St Bartholomew's Burnley, Sunday 7th June 2026

(Feast of Corpus Christi)

I. Why today do we celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi, the body and blood of Christ, the Eucharist? Why is it so important at this point of the year?

We've been through a lot over the past few weeks. Since December last year, we've celebrated the incarnation at Christmas and Epiphany. We've followed Jesus in suffering and passion and death in Lent and Holy Week; we've spent several weeks joyfully celebrating his resurrection during the Easter season. And from there we've moved to his Ascension and then Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit; and finally the feast of the Holy Trinity last week, which brings it all to a climax. We've now seen the full revelation of who and what God is for us. These are the great truths of Christian faith which hold us together and define us and which we commit ourselves to through our baptism.

And now we celebrate, in this feast of the holy Eucharist, just *how* we enter into the incarnation, that suffering and death and resurrection; how we enter into the life of the Blessed Trinity. Because that is where the church, the community of faith, encounters God's great love for us. This feast contains all of these truths and enables us to not only affirm them but experience them in our own hearts and lives.

II. So what is we experience in the Eucharist, in Holy Communion? Our reading from Mark's Gospel, which describes the very first Eucharist on the night before Jesus' passion and death, gives us an insight into what it all about. The language is that of covenant. And covenant is what God does by entering into relationship with us, entering a mutual, two-sided partnership of love. That's the God we find in the Old Testament, the God who makes covenant, who draws close to the people of Israel.

One of the greatest covenants of the Old Testament is the exodus which is particularly celebrated at Passover. And Passover is always ratified by the shedding of blood, the lamb. In the Christian Passover it is Christ whose body is broken, whose blood is shed. And so in the Eucharist we enter into covenant with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. God is not gracious even to enter a partnership with us but also forgives us again and again when we fail, when we don't live out our side of the covenant. The institution in Mark's Gospel takes place in the midst of the denial or betrayal or abandonment of the Twelve. And that's why in our celebration of the Eucharist we begin by confessing our sins, our failure to live out the covenant, so that covenant is once more renewed.

III. In the Eucharist we also encounter time in a strange way. We look back to past, to the death and resurrection of Jesus. We remember, but when we remember we actually make present. It's not just a nostalgic looking back at the past. It is bringing that past into the present: the death and resurrection of Christ.

At the same time we bring into the present the future. In Mark's story, Jesus says that he will never drink of fruit of the vine until he drinks it with them new in the kingdom of God. In other words, the Eucharist looks forward to the Last Days, the time when God will restore all things in Christ. It is a foretaste of the final banquet when we will be united with God with Christ and with one another and with the whole creation in the kingdom of God.

And the word 'present' is really what it's all about. We experience above all else Christ himself. The bread and wine become his body broken for us, his blood poured out for us. In the Eucharist he gives himself to us. And this is not just a spiritual thing. Christianity is on about far more than spirituality. It's also on about the body, matter. John's Gospel tells us that the Word became flesh and dwell among us. And later in John Jesus says: 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life within you.' Here John is speaking of the Eucharist, Holy Communion, where we encounter Christ not just spiritually but physically. Because matter matters to God. The new creation that the creation speaks of is also for our bodies and for the body of the Earth, the universe, as much as it is for our spirits, our souls

IV. The Eucharist is in fact profoundly Trinitarian. It is the Father who makes covenant with us, who draws us into relationship with himself. And it is the Spirit who comes down upon the Bread and Wine and transforms them so that they become Christ's own self given to us in love, drawing us into that sublime communion of love which is the holy Trinity. If you've ever seen the Rublev icon, a 15th century Russian icon, you'll see the three figures of the Trinity seated around a table together. But there's fourth place at that table and that's for us, for the church, for the whole creation.

Our response to that extraordinary love is that of thanksgiving. That's what the word 'Eucharist' literally means. The great prayer of the Eucharist is a prayer of thanksgiving in which the church gives thanks to God for creation and for salvation. It's where we represent not just ourselves but the whole creation in giving thanks to our Creator: the one who creates and re-creates us and all things. Thanksgiving lies at the heart of the Eucharist and of our life together.

V. Sometimes the holy Eucharist is called 'Mass' and the word is really important because it comes from a Latin word that means 'sending'. A serious implication of the Eucharist that it is not just for us but it also sends us out for others. We are to be the body of Christ for the world, in the world. Christ feeds us so that we may feed others: both spiritually and physically. We feed the hungry, those who lack the physical things of life that they need to survive, those who lack justice. We feed those who are hungry for God, for love, for meaning, for hope. That is our mission. And that mission derives directly from the Eucharist.

So today we are called to share in Christ's own self at this altar, this table, to celebrate and give thanks for what Christ has done for us. But we are also called to go out into the world and share that love, that presence, that food, with the hungry in whatever sense they need God's love and justice.

Thanks be to God.

Mthr Dorothy