

## ***About today's Mass readings, THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST***

### **First Reading: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16**

Here the Church sets before us the model for the Eucharist, that is, God's care in feeding his people during the long desert trek of the Exodus from Egypt. During this time the Israelites were fed with manna; they called this 'bread from heaven', so that it has become the model for the bread of the Eucharist. As in all folk-tales, the story has gradually grown in the telling, but originally manna seems to have been the wholly unexpected and seemingly-miraculous provision of a sweet substance exuded from a tamarisk bush. The Hebrews did not know what it was, and, with a word-play typical of the Bible, etymologized it as 'man-hu', the Hebrew for 'What is it?' The reading also stresses that this heavenly gift was a symbol of divine Wisdom, God's revelation of himself given from heaven, for Christians associated with the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the saying, quoted by Jesus to Satan during his Testing in the Desert, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' The manna became the symbol and reminder of God's unfailing care for his people throughout their journey, just as the Eucharist is the expression of God's care for his people today.

### **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17**

St Paul, in writing to the difficult and divided Christian community at Corinth, chides them for their disunity and selfishness. There were some rich members of the community, who arrived at the Eucharist early, took all the best places, and proceeded to unpack their hampers and feast, while the later comers – presumably the workers and slaves – justifiably felt excluded and remained hungry. In the strongest terms Paul insists that the Eucharist must be the symbol and expression of unity, and that those who prevent it being so are making themselves 'answerable for the body and blood of the Lord', language also used in the Book of Common Prayer. Paul seems to use 'the body of Christ' interchangeably of both the Eucharistic bread and the Eucharistic body which is the community of faith, united in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is difficult to see when he means one, and when the other. He obviously regards them both as equally important and equally sacred. Later in the letter he will explain that the community is an organism, in which everyone has their own, individually special part to play, all living with the Spirit of Christ as the life-giving principle. Unless this life is truly shared it is distorted and fails of its purpose. This is particularly pertinent during this Lockdown when public celebrations of the Mass are forbidden.

### **Gospel: John 6:51-58**

This is the last of the readings from the Bread of Life discourse in the Fourth Gospel. It moves on from seeing Christ as the Wisdom of God, as intimated in the first reading, who must be accepted and believed, to the sacrament of eating the bread of life. These correspond to the two halves of the Mass: first the Liturgy of the Word, then the Eucharistic banquet. We are all so diet-conscious nowadays that it is quite obvious that the food we eat affects us. By eating Christ we are assimilated into him. But, just as, if I am sick, food does me no good and can even harm me, so if I eat Christ sacramentally without wanting to be moulded into him, it does me no good at all. That is why Paul complained that the Corinthians were answerable for the death of Christ. And drinking the blood of Christ? Blood is the sign of life – if there is no blood, there is no life – and God is the Lord of life and death. So if I receive Christ's blood I take on his life, his divine life, as the gift of God. That has alarming side-effects: it means I share Christ's life with other Christians. We all live with the same life's blood. Do I really share my life, my talents, my goods with others, knowing that I share the same bloodstream? Corpus Christi is as much a celebration of the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ as it is a Thanksgiving for the Institution of the Eucharist. The question we, and any Christian Community, either globally or locally, must ask not only on this day but every day is obvious: are we truly willing to be Corpus Christi, Christ's Body on earth today, or are we content to stay within the confines of our walls, literal as well as metaphorical? As we have been reminded very harshly during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Church is more than bricks and mortar, but the life of faith and witness sustained by hope and trust. As we gradually begin to reopen our buildings we must return to them rejoicing in this deeper realisation of our vocation as the Body of Christ in truth and reality.