

'Contained in the very smallest'

Ex 24: the blood of the Old Covenant

Heb 9: *how much more effectively the blood of Christ can purify our inner self*

Mk 14: 12–16; 22–26: *this is my Body, this is my Blood, the blood of the covenant*

I want to start by giving you two quotations. The teenager in the pew — and maybe that was you, once upon a time! — is prone to quote, “Mass is boring!” But, funnily enough, this is *not* what the Church says. This is what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has to say about 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 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 consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. (#1323)*

What an astonishingly rich and moving paragraph! It's one of 100 paragraphs in the *Catechism* dedicated to the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, taking up a full 22 pages! The Preface of the Mass, today, also, is a glorious summary

of our belief in this most holy Sacrament, beautiful phrases that I urge you to listen out for, when I sing it a little later: *“the saving memorial of the Cross ... the acceptable gift of perfect praise ... this sacred mystery ... this wondrous Sacrament ... the sweetness of Your grace ...”* These are little summaries, trying to encompass in human language a gift that is truly divine, perhaps the most surprising Gift of our dearly beloved Saviour. How, in mere words of mortals — howsoever steeped in theological learning and ancient piety — can we encapsulate the whole of the Holy Eucharist, when God has given it to us as “the acceptable gift of *perfect praise*”? How can one homily, of one poor priest, try to sum up adequately this mystery which is at the heart of the Church's whole devotional life, the beating heart of the divine liturgy? One cannot, and one simply bows before the audacity of God to give this Sacrament of Himself to us, committed into our hands, placed onto our tongues, offered to our souls.

I always find it beautiful that, just days after the conclusion of the Easter season, and having celebrated the

Holy Trinity last Sunday, we come now to highlight the Blessed Sacrament of Jesus's presence in the Church on this feast of *Corpus et Sanguis Christi*: "The Body & Blood of the Lord." The culmination of all that God the Holy Trinity has done for us is that He gives Himself to us in the Holy Mass. That eternal sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross; that glorious victory over death in the Resurrection; that happy return to heaven in the Ascension, taking with Him our human flesh; that powerful world-changing gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed on the Church at Pentecost ... all these loving acts of our loving God are wrapped up in the gift of the Holy Mass. Everything that Jesus is, everything that He wishes for us, is contained within the simple forms of the Eucharist. It's an awesome thing, that at the heart of our faith is the highest reality, the Almighty Son of God, choosing to conceal Himself in the simplest things, the appearance of bread and wine, as food and drink for our souls.

There is a phrase of St Thomas Aquinas — also inscribed on the tombstone of St Ignatius of Loyola,

founder of the Jesuits — which Pope Benedict and also Jesuit Pope Francis have been known to quote. It runs like this: *non coerceri maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est*, "not to be limited by the greatest ... and yet to be contained in the very smallest — this is divine." Nowhere is this more true than in the Eucharist. God has chosen not only to take flesh, humbling as that was, but He has chosen to stoop lower — to be "contained in the very smallest" — and restrict Himself to the outward forms of the Mass. He has, literally, placed Himself into our hands. Such humility is characteristic of God: in His divine loving, He desires more to be with us than to cling on to His majesty. Since He cannot approach us in the fullness of His awesome glory, He chooses instead to come to us in ways that we can understand and appreciate. So, He comes in the flesh, God made Man, to speak the Word of God to us in human speech ... And then — the great culmination! — He reduces Himself to the appearances of bread and wine, offering us His very Body and Blood so that He can come and dwell within us, nourishing us, giving us *His* life

for the flourishing of *our* life.

The longer we contemplate this mystery, the more we cannot help but be moved deeply in love for God. All this, God has done for us! All this, God is willing to do for us ... for me! So deeply does He care for me, and wish to be with me (*in me!*), that He has given us the Eucharist. Ever since the Last Supper — as we heard in the Gospel — as Jesus began to take His leave from the apostles in the way that they had known Him for three years' ministry, we have received from Jesus this gift of Himself. He is just as present to us in the Eucharist as He was to those apostles that night of the Last Supper. Jesus's words are meant as true and real: "*This is My Body ... This is My Blood ... Do this in memory of Me.*" The Son of God means what He says, and wants us to feast on Himself, to feast on the divine power, the grace, forgiveness and charity that flow from His divine, sacred heart. As His Sacred Body, and His Precious Blood, are given to us from the altar of sacrifice, in Holy Communion, we are made clean, we are united to our Saviour, we are forgiven and made holy.

Here are some words we heard there in the Letter to the Hebrews: "*the blood of Christ, who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God.*"

As we keep this blessed feast today, let's give thanks to God for all that the Mass means: all that it has meant to generations of Catholics through the centuries; all that it has meant to the saints, as they adored and served Jesus in the Mass and in their heroic lives; all that it means to us, every day, every week, the living presence of our beloved Saviour at the heart of the Church, the heart of our Sunday, and the heart of *each day* if possible. Let's be stirred today, through this feast, not to take the Mass for granted; let's thank God deeply for our participation in the Mass. Nowhere else on earth can we have the intimacy with God that we enjoy in the Eucharist.

We are having difficulty summing up the riches of the Holy Eucharist. We might also have difficulties summing up the joys and blessings of this academic year,

now careering rapidly towards its close. For some of you, I know, plenty of exams stretch into the coming weeks — our prayers are with you! — but for others of you, I am aware, this is your last Sunday at Newman House this year. How can we put into words what we have received from Newman House? Please God, it includes some great spiritual joys ... and much of it will centre around this Holy Sacrament: Mass, Adoration, Holy Communion; the fount of graces that Jesus opens up to us. Some of you have drunk at that fountain for the first time, through your recent Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion; others have deepened their love for Jesus through quiet time spent in this Chapel and in Adoration, simply gazing upon His sacred presence and listening for His gentle voice; others have encountered Jesus in the Mass here at Newman House for the very first time in their life, and are contemplating their next steps, drawn by the Saviour into His Holy Church. Whatever this year has brought — its challenges and sadnesses as well as its joys — the very best way to give thanks for this year, and to make a perfect

offering of it, is to be here united in the self-offering of Jesus in the Mass, expressing one's thanks to the Saviour in this Sacrament whose very name, *Eucharist*, means “thanksgiving.”

*Jesus, we love You;*

*Jesus we thank You;*

*Jesus we adore You;*

*Jesus we cannot receive enough of Your most holy Presence:*

*give us always a deep and committed love for You in the Mass;*

*guide us with love, and faith and joy into the summer ahead, that Your Sacrament may be the safeguard that anchors our daily life and makes of our little lives that are so precious to you “the acceptable gift of perfect praise.”*