Corpus Christi Homily 2022

Let's just take a look at the cross hanging above the altar. Why is it there and not, for example, on a back wall?

Simply because when Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me," and when I say that today, he is not talking about just the supper, but about what the Last Supper and this Holy Communion we share in today is all about. And it is about his death and resurrection, offered for us.

The most important thing about our Mass is not some isolated idea about transubstantiation and the bread and wine becoming his body and blood, though that is a major part of it, it is that through that and all else in the Mass, we are sharing in, participating in Jesus' very death and resurrection.

His death 2000 years ago is an historical event, but what we have to grasp, to understand, is that it is not limited by history, our idea of time. Every time we share in this Mass we are sharing in his death, or to put it better, in his offering himself out of love for us.

So we offer our own lives with his. Jesus does this for us and approaches his Father for us, and he invites us at each Mass to share in that offering (or in our somewhat odd translation this 'oblation' which is the same as offering.)

At the Passover the Jews say, every time we share in this Passover meal we are sharing in our ancestors' escape from slavery in Egypt. That is their prayer. Sharing that journey of escape.

Now, as Jesus prays the Passover with his disciples, he opens up a new horizon to us when he says, what I am opening up for you is not just escape from a form of slavery, but salvation for you, freedom from sin if you like, so I invite you to take this journey with me.

If we want to understand what it is to receive communion today, we should look at the cross first and say 'Thank you' (=Eucharist) and then say, Yes I am coming on this journey to salvation. And with your act of unreserved love and self- gift for me, I am joining my life to yours in offering myself too.

One of the reasons Catholics are so keen to preserve our sense of what Mass is all about, is that if we lose it or water it down, we lose this understanding of what Jesus has opened up for us and his love for us.

Where does this take us? So as I have said: it is about an act of unreserved love for us. It is about total self-giving of himself for us.

And when it comes to the real presence, that is not just about the bread and wine becoming his body and blood, it is about us entering into a whole relationship with Jesus, being with him in his death and resurrection and his desire to bring us so close to him, to be so present to us, that we do indeed share on this journey to his Father.

His being present to us in the form of bread and wine, enables us to be touched by him.

And in meal form enables us to share in this, gathering with him together. Because at its best, a meal is where we come to share with each other, on many levels.

Perhaps it is just the rushed grabbing of a bit of food and a quick thanks. Perhaps it is a moment where we eat and share with each other on a deeper level; but it is a place where relationships can deepen. (Though to be fair at its worst, some peoples experience of Christmas, it can go the other way. But that is not to sort of meal we are speaking of here.)

When we come to Mass, when we share in the body and blood of Jesus which this feast celebrates, when we listen to the priests saying 'Do this in memory of me,' we accept his invitation to join in his greatest gift to us of himself and life with him and the Father.

But also, remembering the Last Supper in John's Gospel, and what we have said about self-giving, we take from here what he has taught us, and we go out and share that self-giving with others too. Strengthened by his example of what it is to serve.

Finally I would just like to say that Jesus never makes conversion a requirement of communion. For him, eating and sharing a meal with others, remember Zacchaeus, was a part of the journey of healing and the way to communion, which is sometimes something we should remember.