

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	7 June 2026
Service:	Eucharist, Corpus Christi
Preacher:	The Revd Canon Dr Earl Collins, Chancellor

There are some who think that today's festival is perhaps a bit superfluous. Why keep a separate 'Day of Thanksgiving for the Holy Communion'? After all, given that we celebrate Christ's institution of this sacrament every Maundy Thursday, isn't that enough?

However, I don't share that opinion. Keeping a special feast has its own value as well. By doing so we can highlight more joyful aspects of the Holy Communion and reflect more deeply on its meaning. Maundy Thursday has the inevitable shadows of the Holy Week in which it occurs: Christ's betrayal by Judas and almost all his followers, his agony in the garden and arrest, his subsequent trial, suffering, and judicial murder on Good Friday.

But a separate festival of Corpus Christi - positioned in early summer - gives us an opportunity to rejoice at this great sacrament of love in which God gives us everything we need to feed and nourish our faith and discipleship. It helps us understand why we also call it the Eucharist - it is our great thanksgiving.

On Maundy Thursday, as Jesus celebrated his last supper with his disciples, he declared that the bread was his body given for us and that the cup contained his blood poured out for us. Those little words tell us everything we need to know about this sacred mystery of the Eucharist.

Christ gave his body and blood for us when he offered himself to his heavenly Father. The only Son of God was born a child at Bethlehem so that he might offer himself on Golgotha as the perfect sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world. That sacrifice, spanning his death on the cross on Good Friday and resurrection on Easter Sunday, we have celebrated recently at Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost.

Lifted high on the cross, Christ gave his life for us so much did he love us. Like a great magnet he drew to himself all the evil of our fallen world. He took it upon himself and offered it to the Father, who burned it up in the fire of his love. Thus, Jesus saved the world once and for all and won for God a consecrated people – you and me and countless others - a people called out of darkness to sing the praises of God. The Book of Common Prayer puts it admirably. Christ, it states,

...made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world...'

On his last supper, as he faced the coming darkness, Jesus began that full and sufficient sacrifice. As the perfect High Priest, he consecrated himself a perfect offering to God. He gave to God the total gift of his self, becoming thereby the source of salvation for the whole world and he commanded us, 'Do this in remembrance of me.'

In obedience to that command, we repeat his action at every Communion service we celebrate. But there can be no repetition of what he achieved by his single offering. Our celebration of the Eucharist is never that. But nor is it merely a mental recall of a long-past event. Christ is not dead but risen - living and reigning on high. In this sacred meal, empowered by his Holy Spirit, he becomes present. We plead with thanksgiving that one great sacrifice of his, made once and once only: and through him we offer our souls and

bodies to be a living sacrifice to God. We will say that in today's prayer after communion.

But as well as giving himself to the Father, Jesus also gives himself to us. He identified the bread he gives with his body and the contents of the cup with his blood.

What does it mean however that Christ gives himself to us as well as giving himself to the Father in the gift of his body and blood? Some Anglicans sometimes seem not to realise that the Church of England, both in its historic formularies and its public services, insists that in this holy sacrament he really does give us his true body and blood. The 39 Articles of Religion insist that the bread and wine are not mere tokens or badges but effective signs.

They carry with them the presence of Christ, whom we receive by faith. But unlike, for example, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England declines, wisely I think, to define how that happens. We are content, as in the early Church, simply to assert that it is by the power of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the risen Christ in these consecrated gifts is a sacred mystery. It should be received with gratitude, not subjected to analysis or reduced to a formula. God gives himself to us in love - and love defies all logic.

One of the hymns today teaches us how best to view the Eucharist:

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand...

In the body and the blood...

He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heav'nly food.

At Holy Communion welcoming Christ with awe, we should fall silent before this mystery of self-giving love, this heavenly food. As

Jesus promises in today's Gospel, if we receive him in faith, we will draw life from him and from the Father who sent him. In every celebration of the Holy Communion the risen Christ fills us again with his presence, his whole self. He unites us to himself and joins us to one another. That is what the words 'body and blood' really signify - his whole self.

What might we take away from today's celebration? I think it is this mystery of God's self-giving love. Today, in the silent moments after you have received this holy sacrament, give yourself in love to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who have given themselves to you.

And after this service, in the week ahead, let us give ourselves to serving our neighbour in acts of love and mercy. That will be truly to keep the feast of Corpus Christi, when God's self-giving love received here at Holy Communion, impels us in turn to offer others the gift of self, the gift of love.

Then, not only will we receive the Body of Christ at this altar, but we will become the body of Christ in a world desperate for love.