



Reflection for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

14 June

by Mgr Daniel McHugh

The Real Presence

There have been many interesting interviews and stories on the media in the time of “lockdown” due to the Corona Virus epidemic. One of a number that stick in my mind was an interview with the Captain of a huge oil tanker in the Middle East last weekend. He spoke of his responsibility for the crew, and, on such a huge tanker, there are many. The ship, he felt, was almost forgotten: it was out there on the ocean for months, and well beyond the 3 months expected, it is still there a couple of months later, and wondering when it could be received at a port. His job, he felt, was to keep his crew well and happy, to keep their spirits up: the encouragement he needed to give them was supported by the encouragement he received himself from his wife at home. She is there for him every day through the Internet in face-to-face communication. That keeps him going while he holds on for the day he will be with her again.

I thought about our situation in the Church at the moment and the fact that we are kept from the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist with our Churches closed. The Priest is a bit like the Captain of the ship keeping his people going: many of them have turned to the Internet providing Mass remotely to keep their congregation together. And, some have bravely soldiered on in a medium with which they are not familiar! My perception of the situation is that most people tune in to their local parish if they can, or keep in touch with the Priest on Websites and Newsletters.

One Parish I know well, has the Rosary on a Wednesday around the Calvary outside the Church (all observing social distancing). Other individuals have become part of prayer groups for mutual support. Zoom meetings seem to have grown enormously; Priests themselves are starting to use Zoom to reflect on pastoral priorities.

One of those being considered in online Deanery meetings this very week is the fact that Churches are to be readied for the possibility of being open for private prayer this coming week, starting 15 June. I doubt if the Government thought of this step in terms of Corpus Christi, the Solemnity we celebrate this weekend. The fact that we can think of being able to visit the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus X^t really present in the Tabernacles of our Churches is for us something truly

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special, and in fact is partly the focus of this Solemnity: Jesus Risen and with us in the Blessed Sacrament.

It was good to hear Cardinal Nichols speak out on the matter of closed Churches last week, and I am sure this had some impact on Government.

Now, beyond that, we look forward to the possibility of having Sunday Mass once more before too long. Wonderful as the Internet is, and great that we can join others remotely for Sunday Mass - praying the responses, hearing the readings, joining in the Intercessions, and making spiritual communion - it is not the same as being able to be present physically (like the Captain) with **the one we love** and to be nourished with His Very Self, in the Mystery of His Body and Blood.

Jesus says in the Gospel for this Feast “if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His Blood you will not have life in you ... As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me ... anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.”

We understand these words in the way the early Church did, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: “Christ gives us the very Body which he gave up for us on the Cross, the very blood which he poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” And when St Paul recalls that Jesus told us to do this in memory of Him (1 Cor 11) how can we reject his Command, refuse his Invitation. Wonderful as it is to be able to join in the Mass at a distance, full participation cannot take place in the privacy of your room, or even by reading the Scripture account of it as we do in these days. As the Church of the Martyrs, many of whom gave their lives for the Mass and creating Priests hiding places in Penal Times, we long for the Churches to be open for the Mass again as soon as it is safe to do so.

The Eucharist is the Heart of our Faith. It is the mature Christian’s deepest joy. May these days of enforced participation at a distance strengthen our resolve to cherish what is most precious in our lives remembering the words of St John Henry Newman “In the Eucharist the Heart of Jesus beats for us still.” Surely, no special cleaning of our Churches, no organisation of distancing, or health and safety measures can be too much in order to make our participation possible!

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