

Pastoral Letter for Corpus Christi 2017

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Pastoral Letter for Corpus Christi, 18 June 2017

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

The words of the Gospel we have just heard contain a remarkable promise: 'Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever' (John 6:58). This promise of everlasting life comes to its fulfilment in the death and resurrection of Jesus, in which he not only shares our human nature, destined for death, but also gives to us the gift of new life after that death. This promise lies at the very core of our faith and it is made real, within our reach, in every celebration of Mass. In the Eucharist we come before the Lord, present to us for ever in the very act of fulfilling his promise through the breaking of his Body and the shedding of his Blood. This is the great feast we celebrate today. In the presence of this Sacrament, whether at Mass, at Benediction or reserved in the tabernacle in the silence of a church, our stance is always that of adoration.

This call to adoration, in Latin *adoremus*, is the title being given to an initiative of all the bishops of England and Wales to create a special opportunity for us to reflect on the centrality of the Eucharist in our lives. From 7th to 9th September 2018 there will be a National Eucharistic Congress in Liverpool called *Adoremus*. Through this event, and all the preparation taking place before it, we seek to rejuvenate Eucharistic adoration in our parishes as the source of strength for our lives and for our mission, that of making present the love and compassion of Jesus in our society. Every diocese will be taking part and I hope that many of you will be willing to make the pilgrimage to this Eucharistic Congress next September. Incidentally, the last National Eucharistic Congress took place in 1908 and permissions for a public procession with the Blessed Sacrament were refused!

There is good reason why our participation should be strong. Tucked away in Covent Garden, in central London, is the Parish Church of Corpus Christi. In October 1874, one of my predecessors, Cardinal Manning, preached there, saying how it was the first church in England since the Reformation to be graced with the dedication Corpus Christi. Today that church is being rejuvenated and rendered beautiful once more, a centre indeed for our Eucharistic adoration.

And there is another reason for our special attention to the Blessed Sacrament. A priest of this diocese, Fr Francis Stanfield, composed the wonderful hymn to the Blessed Sacrament, *Sweet Sacrament Divine*. He was for a while parish priest of the Parish of the Immaculate Conception and St Joseph in Hertford and priest in charge at St Edmund of Canterbury, Old Hall Green, also in Hertfordshire. But it was as parish priest of Corpus Christi in Covent Garden that he wrote this famous hymn which I sincerely hope is well known to you all.

In prayer before the Blessed Sacrament we slowly discover that there we find a home for every heart. For this reason we pray with suppliant hearts, full of love and heartfelt praise. We come into the presence of our Blessed Lord with our anxieties and troubles. But there all restless yearnings cease and sorrows all depart. There, in the peace of his presence, we can speak freely, telling our tale of sorrow and distress, whispering as it were into his ear. This is a Sacrament of shelter and a shoreline of safety.

In my experience, it takes time spent in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, the Body and Blood of the Lord there in front of our eyes, before we realise that in its far depths our Godhead's majesty is softly shining. This is indeed the true light of the world, the world's true Jubilee. And seeing this with the eyes of faith, and sensing it in our open, loving hearts, we pray most fervently that this sweet light may always shine upon us so that we never lose our sense of direction, our instinct for our heavenly home.

I pray most earnestly today that this Solemnity of the Sacred Body and Blood of the Lord will draw us more deeply into the glory of this sweet Sacrament. I pray that our preparation for *Adoremus*, the Eucharistic Congress of September 2018, and our participation in it, will reawaken in us all the deep desire to share our faith, to invite others to come to its consolations and find again its joys.

In this way we will take to heart again the wonderful words of our Blessed Lord: 'As I, who am sent by the Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me' (John 6:57). In receiving this food, in prayer before this Sacrament, let us always remember: *Adoremus*, Come, let us adore him.

May God bless you all, and please remember me in your prayers.

Yours devotedly,

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster