



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Corpus Christi 2019 11.00am Choral Eucharist

There is a great story from the steamy days of the Reformation, Martin Luther was debating with another devout Protestant Reformer. Some say Zwingli, some say Calvin. Luther is arguing that when Jesus said ‘This is my Body’, he meant just what he said. Luther eventually reaches for the knife with which he had been eating and stabs it into the wood of the table and carves, silently, ‘Hoc est enim corpus meum’. This is my Body. That was the end of *that* discussion.

Luther is of course most famous for another assault on a wooden surface. Not a table this time, but a door, when he nailed his 95 theses onto the door at Wittenberg Castle Church. Today, this great feast of Corpus Christi – the thanksgiving for Holy Communion – draws these two stories together, because today is all about doorways. A celebration of the liminal.

Read what Jesus actually said at the Last Supper in the Gospels and in St Paul's letters, read St John's account of the Wedding at Cana and the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes – read them in the light of the rest of chapter 6 of St John's Gospel as he clearly intended. Read all that and you will be left in no doubt of what Jesus meant by what He said about the Eucharist. It would be wonderful thing to do on the sofa with a glass of wine this afternoon.

Zwingli's objection was that Jesus could not be both in heaven *and* here on earth in the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood. But suspend such limits we might rather silly-ly place upon what God choses to do, and we cannot help but see that here we have as unfathomable a mystery, as scandalous a love. As great a gift, as enormous a truth. Mystery, love, gift, truth.

The bread and wine of the Eucharist is a doorway. Here heaven and earth meet because Jesus is here, hidden in bread and wine. Hidden, yes. Mystery, yes. Mind boggling, yes. Here, yes.

Jesus gave us this way to be with Him and live in Him until we die, or He comes again. Can you be a Christian without the Eucharist? Why would you try - it is His gift to us.

Anyway, back to the doorways. So we see that the Eucharist is a doorway between heaven and earth. It is also the doorway to our week. Each Sunday is the last and first day of the week. We come here to one of Jesus' altars every week because we need to be with Jesus as we begin again. Like a stepping stone, He is our rock on the pilgrim path of life. It is so easy to drift, and not to notice. When other things pop up – can we *really* not find an altar somewhere to meet Jesus in the Eucharist? So often the Eucharist becomes the first thing to be dropped? Just as our bodies wither without food and drink, we *need* to be plugged into the grace of the Eucharist to keep growing in grace, faith, hope and love. The doorway of heaven and earth, and the doorway of every week.

There's also the physical doorway of this church. Each week having received the grace of the Sacrament, we carry Jesus in us, out. Jesus has poured Himself out for us here – just as He did on the cross. And so we are sent out to have Eucharist-shaped lives. Lives that are poured out in the love that we have received. A line attributed to St John Chrysostom sums this up rather crisply: "If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find him in the chalice."

The Sacrament is a doorway. It brings heaven to us and us to heaven. It is the doorway of a new week, and

our doorway from the altar of Salvation, bearing Salvation into the world.

Let's try to hold all these doorways in our minds as in a while we'll sing that great hymn 'All for Jesus', written by a priest of this parish. After Holy Communion, immediately after the notices, you're invited to follow the choir out onto the portico, singing. Don't hang back, go right out and stand along the back of the pillars. The children will be at the heart of our worship; and then Fr Stephen in the doorway of our church will make the sign of the cross with Jesus in Holy Communion. We will look upon Him and be blessed by Jesus. But not just us: all the people of our parish, of Marylebone, of our city will be ushered (knowingly or not) into the doorway of heaven. As that happens you may like to bow, or genuflect and make the sign of the cross. Don't be bashful – respond freely. Then we will be sent out from there to live out what we have received.

People of the Eucharist, people of the threshold, the doorway.

It cost Him everything, but Christ our God has given us this great gift. So, with our whole lives: Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God. It is meet and right so to do.