



PASTORAL LETTER  
OF THE  
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY  
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM  
FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF CORPUS CHRISTI  
17/18 JUNE 2017

*Do not forget the Lord your God.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This weekend we celebrate the joyful feast of Corpus Christi - the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. It is one of the beautiful summer feasts that follow Pentecost and that open up for us a deeper understanding of Our Lord's gift of the Holy Spirit and of the Spirit's influence on our lives.

Corpus Christi is the second of three feasts that lead us into the mystery of God's love for the world and in particular His personal love for each one of us. Once we have reflected on the paschal mystery of Our Lord's passion, death and resurrection and its completion with the Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit all that is left for our contemplation is love.

St John assures us that *God is love*. God's nature, revealed to us in the humanity of his beloved Son Jesus Christ, is love - and its perfect expression is the interior life of the Blessed Trinity, which we celebrated last Sunday. We believe that there is a continual outpouring of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our own creation and the beauty of creation around us are the outcome of that divine love.

We are drawn deeper into that love by our baptism into Christ's dying and rising and we savour God's love through the Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament of God's loving presence among us. This is what we celebrate in today's feast - and we continue to contemplate it with real wonder and devotion on the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus this Friday.

*God is love*. It is such a sublime aspect of our faith and yet one that we can so easily take for granted. The Book of Deuteronomy urges us: *Do not forget the Lord your God*. Only prayer can bring this truth before us in all its astonishing clarity and simplicity and it is the prayer of the Eucharist that makes this truth a reality in our own lives.

In the Eucharist we feed on the love of God and as we feed so we grow in love, until it has to overflow into the conduct of our lives and influence the choices that we make. It also overflows into our prayers of intercession, as we remember especially this weekend those who died or were injured in the fire in London, praying for their grieving or anxious relatives and for those now supporting them in the local community.

During Evening Prayer today we reflect on the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament in some treasured words attributed to St Thomas Aquinas. *O sacrum convivium!* speaks of the *sacred banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of future glory is given to us.* Past, present and future are held together for us whenever we eat His flesh and drink His blood for *anyone who eats this bread will live forever.*

There is a sense in which the Eucharist takes us out of ourselves so that we can truly find ourselves in the Lord. *He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him.* We only find our true identity and our calling in life through Christ and we need the food of the Eucharist to become the person that God has created us to be.

So the feast of Corpus Christi is also about how our lives are destined by God to unfold if we will allow our Lord to live in us through His presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Only His Real Presence in the Eucharist can achieve this in us and for us and on Corpus Christi we affirm our faith in the Lord's true and abiding presence in the Eucharist until time comes to an end and we enter into eternal life with Him.

Our Eucharistic faith makes us see the world around us differently- with reverence for God's creation and especially with love for God's image in every man and woman. The Eucharist opens our eyes so that we see one another with love and we treat all God's creatures with love. And this always begins in prayer, especially the prayer of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, when looking at Our Lord makes us look with greater compassion and understanding at others.

Because the Blessed Sacrament is so central to the lives of Catholics we need, every so often, to stop and think more carefully about this tremendous gift that has been entrusted to us. It is for this reason that we shall be celebrating next year a Eucharistic Congress in Liverpool under the title *Adoremus - Let us worship.* For three days, between 7th and 9th September 2018, the Catholic community of England and Wales will be invited to come together to reflect on the Lord's presence in this great Sacrament and to adore Him in the Eucharist.

Bishop Robert is leading our national planning for the Eucharistic Congress of 2018 and much more information will become available over the coming months. But today we can look forward to the Congress and receive Our Lord in the Eucharist with renewed gratitude and praise, so that we never forget the wonderful gift we have received or take the Blessed Sacrament for granted.

The presence of the Blessed Sacrament in our churches is a call to prayer - a silent echo of the message of Deuteronomy: *Do not forget the Lord your God* - and prayer is natural to human beings in the presence of God. In one of his thoughtful poems Tennyson gives voice to this through the words of the dying King Arthur:

*....More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats...  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer*

*Both for themselves and those who call them friend.  
For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.*

Let us honour Christ in the Blessed Sacrament today - let us pray for one another in His presence. *Adoremus!*

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠Bernard Longley  
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 16 June 2017 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on 17/18 June 2017