Lectio Divina – Corpus Christi Sunday - Year A

Contexts

John’s Gospel – in brief

* **Structure of John’s Gospel**

**1:1-18:** **Prologue** – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

**1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs**: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

**Chapter 6 – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!**

**13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory**: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

**21:1-25: Epilogue**: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

* It is the only Gospel to call Jesus “God”.
* Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God’s only Son, possessing God’s own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God’s children. (Raymond Brown SS)
* Jesus is ‘The Bread of Life’ who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 6:51-58 – things to notice

* There is no record of the Last Supper in John’s Gospel. John’s teaching about Jesus as the Bread of Life (and its Eucharistic overtones) comes in Chapter 6 which begins with the feeding of the 5,000 at Passover time. This immediately alerts us to the fact that what follows is the Johannine understanding of Jesus as the new Passover.
* For John, the real Passover meal Jesus celebrates is on the cross where his body is broken and his blood spilt in the ultimate sign of God’s love.
* Today’s Gospel comes from a much longer section from 22 – 71 which is an argument between Jesus, the crowd and the Jews about Jesus claim to be Bread of Life.
* Today’s Gospel *begins with the announcement*: “I am the living bread which has come down from heaven…”
* *followed by a promise*: “… will live for ever;”
* *and another statement*: “and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.”
* Note the change from ‘bread’ to ‘flesh’.
* Matthew, Mark & Luke all use the word ‘soma’ – body – during the Last Supper narratives. John uses the word ‘sarx’ – flesh.
* The Jews (religious leaders) are horrified and amazed at Jesus’ saying he will give them his flesh to eat. It is an idea that is both abhorrent and impossible for ‘this man’ to do.
* Jesus insists: if you do not *eat and drink* you will not have life in you.
* Note the addition of ‘drink his blood’.
* To speak of ‘flesh and blood’ in Judaism is to speak of the whole living human person.
* Anyone who does eat and drink has eternal life and will be raised up on the last day.
* Real food, real drink – a contrast to ‘manna’ or ordinary food which sustains life but does not prevent death. What is on offer here is something that gives life and endures beyond death. This is real food also in the sense of being able to be seen, touched and eaten, *and* it contains the presence of Jesus.
* Remember that John’s Gospel is addressed to post-resurrection Christians, so the words Jesus speaks here are about how the Christian community encounters God’s love (broken body, spilt blood – broken Bread, shared Wine), celebrates, remains in communion with (‘he lives in me and I live in him’) and continues to draw life from the risen Jesus (just as I draw life from the Father…) in its Eucharistic celebrations.
* Typically for John, whoever is in communion with Jesus is also and at the same time in communion with the Father and draws the Father’s life from Jesus.
* Finally, a reference back to ‘manna’. Jesus is not talking about something which happened a long time ago. He is talking about a new and different kind of bread.

The Liturgical Context

Our return to the Ordinary Time of the Church year is marked by three feasts: Pentecost (2 Sundays ago), Trinity (last Sunday) and the Body and Blood of Christ (today).

These feasts celebrate our faith in God (Trinity) and the enduring presence of Christ in the Church and the world through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) and the Eucharist (Body & Blood of Christ).

Like last Sunday (Trinity) today is not a day for trying to explain how the presence of Jesus gets into the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist, but rather reflecting on the meaning of the Eucharist in the life of a Christian community.

The first reading from Deuteronomy: God sustains his people in the desert with manna and with water ‘to make you understand that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord’. So, the word of God is real food.

Second reading from Corinthians: communion with the body and blood of Christ makes us a single body – the body of Christ.

The Body & Blood of Christ in the Eucharist is the tangible symbol and reminder of the living presence of Jesus in the church.

Our feast today also celebrates Christ’s presence with us in the community of the Church.

The Eucharist is our sacrament of communion, not only with Christ and God, but also with all those called into the Christian community.

Our communion binds us to one another in a sacred union of mind and heart with Jesus.

The word ‘communion’ means to ‘share/have/hold in common’.

In Holy Communion what we share, have and hold in common with God and each other is Jesus Christ present in the Bread and the Wine.

A deeper meaning of ‘communion’ is to be of one mind and heart. It is the Holy Spirit who keeps us in communion of mind and heart with God, with Christ and with each other.

We are nourished and fed with the life of Christ so that we may be Christ in the world. Together we become the living Body of Christ alive and active in our world.

That is what energises us to work to transform the injustices and limitations of the world around us. We transform them with the vision (mind) and love (heart) of God so that every person may live, breathe, eat and drink of all the good things God gives us: nature, knowledge, understanding, technology, food, medicine, compassion, justice, goodness, love, peace, forgiveness, encouragement and hope.

So we, in our turn, become the Eucharist that feeds those around us with the nourishment of respect, love, breadth of heart and vision, compassion, hope and forgiveness which enables them to grow in their human lives well.