

# Celebrating

The Solemnity  
of the Body and  
Blood of Christ  
*(Corpus Christi)*

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**T**his booklet has been prepared as part of a series of resources for the Year of the Eucharist that Pope John Paul asked the Church to keep from October 2004 to October 2005.

*It offers guidance to parish priests and to those others who share with them responsibility for celebration of the liturgy, principally the parish liturgy preparation group.*

*The text provides a range of information, provides pointers to best practice and raises a number of questions that deserve to be engaged with.*

*Some parishes will perhaps find it difficult to give consideration to all the matters raised this year. Where that is the case it is hoped that they will find the booklet will be something they can return to again in the future.*

*Page 13 of the booklet offers a work sheet that might be used in considering any one of the various issues raised here, or indeed to address the more general question of 'How we have we been keeping Corpus Christi in our parish'.*

*This booklet does not directly address all the matters that might be considered — for example ensuring that Holy Communion is ministered from elements consecrated at the Mass, and not from the reserved Sacrament; the Communion Procession, and ensuring that Holy Communion is ministered in a prayerful way.*

*Additional resources are available to assist with these matters. They have been prepared to accompany the publication of the revised General Instruction to the Roman Missal and Celebrating the Mass, a pastoral guide published by the Bishops' Conference to accompany the General Instruction and to address the particular circumstances of the Church in England and Wales. They can be downloaded from [www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources)*

# The History of the Feast

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, popularly known as *Corpus Christi*, is observed in England and Wales on the Thursday following on the Solemnity of the Most Blessed Trinity. This feast is both a doctrinal and cultic response to heretical teaching on the mystery of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the crowning moment of an ardent devotional movement concentrated on the Sacrament of the Altar. It was extended to the entire Latin Church by Urban IV in 1264.

## **Tradition**

Popular piety encouraged the process that led to the institution of the feast of *Corpus Christi*, which reciprocally inspired the development of new forms of Eucharistic piety among the people of God.

For centuries, the celebration of *Corpus Christi* remained the principal point of popular piety's concentration on the Eucharist. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, faith, in reaction to various forms of protestantism, and culture (art, folklore and literature) coalesced in developing lively and significant expressions Eucharistic devotion in popular piety.

## **Developments**

The Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* has inspired new forms of Eucharistic piety in the people of God, even up to our current day. Amongst these forms of piety, the Eucharistic procession which prolongs the Eucharistic celebration so that the Christian people “render unto the Blessed Sacrament a public witness of faith and veneration,” is particularly noteworthy. As such, “The traditional *Corpus Christi* procession should be lived with particular devotion in this year. Faith in the God who, in becoming incarnate, made himself our traveling companion, should be proclaimed everywhere, particularly in our streets and amongst our houses as an expression of our grateful love, and as a fount of inexhaustible blessings” (*Mane nobiscum Domine*, 18).

cf. *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, 160,  
*The Year of the Eucharist: Suggestions and Proposals*, 10

## **Celebrating a Holyday of Obligation**

Holydays in the tradition combined both a celebration of a particular Mystery of Faith, and a rest from work. The tradition gave rise to the word 'holiday' which if now generally robbed of its connection with a celebration of faith, retains the idea of rest from work and something to rejoice in!

Regretably, at least in England and Wales, and with the notable exception of Christmas Day, most holydays are now celebrated on days when the Church works. The principal holydays are now most often characterised not by a spirit of celebration but by the fact that they are days on which, on top of everything else, the faithful are obliged to take part in the celebration of Mass. Rather than a day of rejoicing and rest, it can sometimes seem that an extra burden is placed on the faithful.

### ***What do we do?***

There is a certain temptation, particularly in city and town centre churches to offer a holyday celebration of Mass which is as short as it can be. No matter than there are more texts than usual to be proclaimed and prayed – three readings as opposed to the usual two on weekdays, a Gloria and a Creed not there on Ferial days. The 'target' is to have Mass said (and in truth there often is no music in the celebration) as quickly as possible. It is not uncommon for Mass to be over within the half hour.

The temptation is there because of the desire to meet the constraints of those who will come to Mass during their lunch hour.

Such practice is open to criticism from the point of view of the norms of the Church concerning good quality celebration, and the place of such celebration in the life of a community. However first it must be noted that usually these practices are undertaken for the best of motives, and those taking part are in a very clear way fulfilling their 'obligation' to the Holyday.

### ***What might we lack?***

Where does the practice fall short? Where are the times for silent reflection urged by the General Instruction, during the Liturgy of the Word, and after the reception of Holy Communion. Where the homily, the breaking open of God's word, to help the nourishment of God's chosen people? Where the music that should enrich the liturgy, especially on Sundays and holydays? Where the sense that this is celebration and not just prayer which fulfils the obligation?

## ***What should we strive for?***

Recent statements from both the late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, and from Pope Benedict XVI have urged the Church to seek after celebration of the liturgy that is not content with the minimum but ensures that the encounter with the mystery celebrated penetrates consciences, nourishes the lives of the faithful, and leads them to become more and more conformed to Christ himself. (cf. *Spiritus et Sponsa*, esp. 10,14,15; *First Message of Pope Benedict XVI*, 20/4/05)

How might this be achieved? In many cases it will be achieved in part by changing our practices with regard to the liturgy itself – for example allowing for more time for silence, or allowing music to fulfil its ministerial function, for example by enriching the quality of the celebration itself. Town and city centre churches might perhaps indicate the anticipated finishing time of Mass as well as the starting time to allow people to plan their lunch hour appropriately. Maybe they can look to early evening or early morning celebrations (in addition to lunch times), as this might more easily allow the time for celebration.

But liturgy takes place in the context of the life of the Church more broadly. It is not simply something individuals go to, it is something which a community celebrates. So there is value in looking at how the community celebrates the Holy Day, not only how it celebrates the liturgy or fulfils the obligation.

Churches in residential areas might arrange to have early morning celebrations of the liturgy, followed by a breakfast for those attending before they leave to go off to work, or to school (experience suggests such early morning Masses – and breakfasts – are especially pleasing to children!). Evening celebrations of Mass might be accompanied by a buffet supper. One cannot ignore the fact that many commuters will not have had a substantial meal since lunch time, but rather than rush the celebration so they can get home at a decent hour, why not cater for their needs and make a social event of the Holy Day?

Churches in town and city centres might be able to provide soup and sandwiches for those coming to a lunch time Mass.

We may be able to do little about ensuring holydays are truly holidays, but we can help restore something of the celebratory dimension too them, make them times of rejoicing, rather than an ‘obligation’ to be met.

# The Liturgies of the Solemnity

*Each of the three elements described below requires, and will repay, careful preparation. The greatest attention should be paid to the preparation of the liturgy of the Mass. A planning sheet is provided at the end of this booklet*

## I. Liturgy of the Hours

The Offices of the Solemnity are found in the Volume III of the *Divine Office*, pp 21–41 (pp 310–321 in *Morning and Evening Prayer*).

The Offices may be prayed in their own right, but may also be prayed during a time of Exposition. In addition they provide a resource for prayers and readings for other times of prayer.

## II. Mass

### a) Proper texts

The Proper of the Mass is found on pp 358–9 of the Roman Missal. One of the two Prefaces of the Holy Eucharist should be used. (*Roman Missal*, pp 450–451)

### b) Penitential Rite

Themes related to the Solemnity are to the fore in a number of examples of Form C of the Penitential Rite, examples c ii, c vi, c viii (*Roman Missal*, pp 392–395)

### c) Solemn Blessing

Any of the Solemn Blessings I–V for Ordinary Time may be used or of the Prayers over the People 1–24 (*Roman Missal*, pp 372–373 and 380–383 respectively)

### d) Music

Some general notes are offered here. More detailed guidance on music and the Liturgy of the Eucharist may be found in the document *Music and the Liturgy of the Eucharist* (available at [www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources)).

Particular care should be taken on this day with regard to the music used at Mass, and especially during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Priority should be given to singing the key sung elements of the Common of the Mass – the Gospel and Eucharistic Acclamations, and the Gloria.

In the Communion Rite best practice should be followed with regard to the Communion Song and the Period of Silence or Song after Communion (cf. *Celebrating the Mass* 213, 215).

Care should be taken to choose a Communion Song which can begin immediately after the communal recital of ‘Lord, I am not worthy to receive you...’ and continue until all the assembly have received Communion. So as not to encumber the assembly with books or service sheets during the procession the song may be led by a cantor or choir and include a repeated response or refrain from the assembly.

Suitable settings include:

- Settings of Psalm 115 (116) (The Blessing Cup)
- Settings of Psalm 33 (34) (Taste and See)
- Amen, amen so shall it be — Foster
- Take and Eat — Joncas
- How blest — Schiavone
- Eat this bread — Taizé
- Come Christ’s beloved — Walsh

Although the Communion Song can be followed by another Song after Communion it may be preferable to allow a time of silence to allow for members of the assembly to offer their prayer of thanksgiving in silence, and to contemplate of the mystery celebrated. (This would be particularly appropriate if a time of extended exposition was to follow after Mass, or if a final hymn was to be sung.

If hymns are being sung then it is better for them to be sung as Entrance or Final Hymns rather than at other times. (cf. *Celebrating the Mass* 213)

### III Procession

A Eucharistic Procession ‘is a prolongation of the celebration of the Eucharist: immediately after Mass, the Sacred Host, consecrated during the Mass, is borne out of the Church for the Christian faithful to make public profession of faith and worship of the Most Blessed Sacrament’ (*Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, 162)

Wherever it is possible in the judgement of the diocesan Bishop, a procession through the public streets should be held, especially on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ as a public witness of reverence for the Most Holy Sacrament, for the devout participation of the faithful in the eucharistic procession on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is a grace from the Lord which yearly fills with joy those who take part in it’. (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* 143)

The Church’s guidance for such processions is given in the ritual book *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass* (part

of the *Roman Ritual*). It can be downloaded from [www.liturgyoffice.org.uk](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk)

It will normally begin immediately after the celebration of a Mass. It should normally go from one church to another, but may return to the same church where it began.

### **a) Music**

No particular songs are required to be used during the procession, but suitable ones would include those listed above for use during Communion. Again it is helpful if the songs are sung by a choir with a chant for all participants (as many will be familiar with from the practice in Lourdes).

Traditional hymns might most easily be sung at the beginning or end of the procession, when the congregation is stationary.

### **b) Good order of the procession**

As already noted the decision as to whether a public procession may proceed belongs to the Bishop. Matters that he is likely to take into consideration are the likelihood of the procession provoking reactions of disrespect of the Church or blasphemy towards Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament.

When a public procession cannot be held, the tradition of holding eucharistic processions should not be allowed to be lost. Instead, new ways should be sought of holding them in today's conditions: for example, at shrines, or in public gardens if the civil authority agrees. (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* 144)

Well in advance of any planned procession, the appropriate permissions must also be obtained from any necessary civil authorities – for example the local council or police force for processions taking place on public roads. The civil authorities will indicate the necessary health and safety measures that should be observed for the well-being of worshippers and the general public.

## Other devotions and times of worship

### Exposition and Benediction

#### *Throughout the year*

The Church's guidelines for such celebrations are contained in the ritual book *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass* (part of the Roman Ritual).

The Rite allows for great flexibility concerning what happens during the time of adoration, though there should be readings from scripture, prayers and songs to direct the attention of the faithful to the worship of Christ the Lord. There should also be a homily to assist the congregation in developing a better understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. The Rite provides a lectionary of readings, but other scripture readings may also be substituted. The *Divine Office* may also be prayed during the content of the time of Exposition.

#### *Preparing for Corpus Christi*

Parishes might like to use the occasion of *Corpus Christi* to consider the place of Exposition in its regular routine. The worship of the reserved sacrament is regularly encouraged by the Holy See.

The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* observes:

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is a form of Eucharistic cult which is particularly widespread in the Church and earnestly recommended to her Pastors and faithful. . . . This adoration is a most apt way of expressing the connection between the celebration of the memorial of the Lord's Sacrifice and his continued presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. The reservation of the Sacred Species, so as to be able to administer Viaticum to the sick at any time, encouraged the practice among the faithful of recollection before the tabernacle and to worship Christ present in the Sacrament.

. . . Faith in the Lord's real presence has as its natural consequence the outward and public manifestation of that belief. Therefore, the devotion prompting the faithful to visit the blessed sacrament draws them into an ever deeper share in the paschal mystery and leads them to respond gratefully to the gift of him who through his humanity constantly pours divine life into the members of his Body. Abiding with Christ the Lord, they enjoy his intimate friendship and pour out their hearts before him for themselves and for those dear to them and they pray for the peace and salvation of the world. Offering their entire lives with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit, they derive from this sublime colloquy

an increase of faith, hope, and charity. Thus they foster those right dispositions that enable them with due devotion to celebrate the memorial of the Lord and receive frequently the bread given us by the Father.

In adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, which can take different forms, several elements deriving from the Liturgy and from popular piety come together and it is not always easy to determine their limits:

- a simple visit to the Blessed Sacrament: a brief encounter with Christ inspired by faith in the real presence and characterized by silent prayer;
- adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed for a period of time in a monstrance or pyx in accordance with liturgical norm(178);
- perpetual adoration or the *Quarantore*, involving an entire religious community, or Eucharistic association, or parish, which is usually an occasion for various expressions of Eucharistic piety.

*Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* 164, 165

In addition to the regular practice of a parish the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* might be prepared for by an octave, during which a time of adoration might be led by different parish organizations. These would provide an opportunity for times of prayer which would explore the eucharistic dimension of their various works. Assistance in preparing these times of prayer can be found in the resources produced by the Liturgy Office for the Year of the Eucharist ([www.liturgyoffice.org.uk](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk))

## Other matters

### Commissioning and re-commissioning of Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion

The practice of the renewal of commitment on Holy Thursday is not recommended. The Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper is the start of the celebration of the Paschal Triduum as a whole. To focus more narrowly on commissioned ministers of Holy Communion at this liturgy would detract from that broader focus. It would also impose an unnecessary element on a liturgy which is already rich and significant.

There are good reasons to commission and re-commission the various sorts of assistant ministers of a parish together – it helps avoid any sense of hierarchy between the ministries, and helps focus on the distinctive quality of the service offered by lay men and women. Appropriate dates for such commissioning include the anniversary of the dedication of the Parish church, or the feast day of the parish patron.

However if Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to be commissioned separately from other ministers then the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* offers a suitable date for their commissioning.

In this case another day of equal dignity in the Church's year should be found for the commissioning of lay ministers of the word, i.e. readers and catechists. Suitable days include Bible Sunday (held at different times in different Christian churches, but commonly on the 2nd Sunday of Advent in Roman Catholic churches), on the Sunday nearest to a feast of St. Paul or one of the Evangelists.

Rites of Blessing of such ministers can be found in the Book of Blessings. An extract can also be found at [www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources)

**T**he following work sheets may be used by the priest presider in preparing for the liturg. They might produce still better results if used by the priest in conjunction with the parish liturgy preparation group.

Making use of the Homily Preparation sheet first will enable the minister or group to review the texts and actions of the Mass before proceeding to more detailed preparation of the music and the liturgy more generally.

More general guidance about the liturgical homily is available in the homiletic materials produced for In Communion with Christ, and which can be downloaded from [www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources)

## How do we keep *Corpus Christi*?

1. What is good about current practice?  
What concerns do you have?

2. In what ways does the documentation affirm or challenge your current practice?

3. Prioritise the issues you have identified.

## Questions for Groups

4. Who is most directly involved in these matters, e.g. liturgical ministers?  
What formation/information is necessary to engage them in the renewal of current practice?

5. How will the assembly be engaged in the process?  
What, in particular, needs addressing at Sunday and/or weekday celebrations?

6. How will you know whether the formation has worked?

# Homily Preparation

## Work Sheet 1

What are the themes that present themselves to you in today's readings and psalm?

What are the themes that present themselves to you in the Mass propers?

What are the themes that present themselves to you in the Ordinary of the Mass?

Where do these themes connect with the actions proper to the liturgy of the or use in the Mass?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore in the homily?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

# Homily Preparation

## Work Sheet 2

<p>The points you have noted from your reflection on the texts of the Mass</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li></ol>	<p>Where and how do these three points connect with the daily life of your community? What is there to learn from this?</p>	
<p>What are the major events in your parish/town at present?</p>          <p>What are the major national/international events at present?</p>	<p>What stories/experiences connect with the theme of mission?</p>          <p>And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?</p>	<p>Main points to be carried forward into homily</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li></ol>

