

June Scripture Reflection: Corpus Christi

Sunday 2nd June celebrates the feast of Corpus Christi. This is a celebration of the Eucharist with its great, many layered meanings and is central to our Christian faith. The main focus is on the sacrament's institution at the last supper of Jesus with his apostles, but Jesus draws on roots which are deep within the Old Testament. It's pulling us back from sin into the perfect relationship we had with God our loving father at the very time of our creation.

The author of Genesis tells us that when God created man, he gave him the fruits of the trees and the grain of the earth to eat. Initially, in this perfect relationship between man and God, there is no violence. No meat was eaten by man. Nature was in harmony. Only after the great flood did God concede and allow man to eat meat. When instituting the Eucharist, Jesus uses the fruit of the vine tree and grain in the form of bread for his meal of the new covenant. It is to be a peaceful, harmonious and non-violent ceremony where man is restored to his original state of innocence and love.

Another thread of the origins of the Eucharist can be traced to the high priest Melchizedek (C2160b.c.). He greets Abraham after his victory and makes a sacrifice of thanksgiving using bread and wine. The use of bread and wine is spiritually highly symbolic as both grape and grain have been transformed from one substance into another (by the use of yeast). It speaks of the transformative nature of man when in relationship with God.

As time progressed the use of animals for sacrifice took place to express relationship and appeasement with God. The prophets (Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah) criticised this as not being in accord with God's will (Amos 5:21-24) "I will not even look at the communion sacrifices of your fatlings.....but let justice roll down like waters, righteousness like an ever flowing stream". The criticism was that the people were ignoring the commandments and thought that a religious, sacrificial observance absolved them from living a good life. The people ignored the prophets and continued to have animal sacrifice as central to their religious practice, particularly in the celebration of Passover.

The later Passover festival, which remembered escape from the Hebrew's slavery in Egypt, was a pilgrimage feast at the Jerusalem Temple. It took the form of a mass slaughter of sheep in the temple courtyard where sheep's throats were cut and blood separated from the meat. Blood was thought to be sacred and belonged to God so animals were sacrificed by priests. The blood was caught in bowls and ran back into the ground and returned to God. The families then took the carcass and celebrated a family meal, saying prayers and recounting the ancient history of salvation. In Jesus' Eucharist, body and blood are united as fully Himself.

John's gospel places Jesus' death on the cross at the same time as the slaughter of the paschal lambs. Jesus uses his own death as the final sacrifice which atones for man's sin as a once and for all blood sacrifice, which unifies us in a loving, peaceful relationship with God. Jesus takes the place of the lambs and becomes the perfect offering of love and reconciliation. Every time we eat the bread and wine of holy communion, we enter into union with Jesus, into the perfect relationship, which was ordained for us in Genesis at the very time of Creation.



Our Lady of
Guadalupe 1531

Our Lady appeared to St Juan Diego and his uncle in Mexico. She appeared to them as pregnant and called for everyone to lovingly take the Eucharist into themselves as she did with her beloved son and become tabernacles of his sacred body.

She calls for a rededication to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

