

**Feast of Corpus Christi  
Solemn Eucharist  
Ely Cathedral 22 May 2008**

It's lovely to be back in this stunning Cathedral and I thank you for the invitation. Ely Cathedral was part of my daily experience for nearly 7 years and my best memories of it are to do with the daily Eucharist as the Cathedral is at its most beautiful at 7.30am in the mornings and the people who attend then are beautiful too we said goodbye to one of them this afternoon.

I have attended the Eucharist somewhere ever since my mother first took me to church when I was two weeks old So I've been part of the Eucharistic assembly for over 65 years now. For some of that time, sadly, the eucharist has been a battle ground. Is it a sacrifice or a memorial?

What happens to the bread and wine when they are consecrated?

What sort of language should we use - ancient or modern?

Should the priest enter the holy of holies on his own and celebrate with his back to us - or should he preside facing us?

And should the "he" sometimes become a "she"?

And what about the Sharing of the Peace - which can easily inaugurate a period of war - I'm facing that again at the moment in my new parishes. And what should the service be called - Holy Communion, Eucharist, or Mass?

The point I'm making is that we have allowed the eucharist to become a battle-ground both within our own church and in our ecumenical relations even today, we can share many good things with our RC partners but we can't share the eucharist yet the Eucharist is supposed to be "The Sacrament of Unity". Our pre-occupation with this sacrament as the "sacrament of DISunity" has, in my book, led us grievously astray putting it another way, our obsession with the *approaches* to the Eucharist has made us ignore the *consequences* of it.

What ARE the consequences of participation in the Eucharist?

The BIG consequence is that we are SENT OUT into the world to be Christ's Body in God's world in other words, we become *apostles* - those who are sent out In this Cathedral, for at least the first 500 yrs of its life, Sunday Mass was in Latin and it ended with a great shout from the priest ITE, MISSA EST.

"Go, you are sent out"

Go and get on with living the Eucharistic life for the rest of the week.

At the reformation, when Cranmer produced the first English Eucharist of 1549, he chose not to include the sending out, except in a hidden form in the blessing So for the next 400 years there was no obvious sending out no commission for communicants.

In our 1967 alternative liturgies (Series Two) the sending out was restored in somewhat restrained language as "Go forth in peace".

In ASB and now in CW it has become "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord", following the prayer which says "Send us out into the world.....".

It's all a bit limp-wristed and full of English understatement but at least it's there though I long for the great shout to be restored at the end GO YOU ARE SENT OUT.

What is this “Eucharistic life” to which we as participants in the Eucharistic Liturgy, are called ?

We are called first, to break open the word of God and apply that Word to our daily lives. Second we are called to offer ourselves, as bread and wine are offered, to be taken and broken and blessed in God’s service - and we need to repeat that offering EVERY time we participate in the sacrament. Third we need to recognise the presence of the Risen Lord in the elements, and to take that presence with us into all the places of our daily existence. And fourth, just as Jesus gives himself to us entirely in this sacrament, so we must give ourselves to others, reminding ourselves that Christians are always to be “persons for others” just as Jesus is the person for us.

A challenge for us all on the Feast of Corpus Christi is Am I / are we living this Eucharistic life? Have we worked out in detail what the Eucharistic life might entail and can we devote much more energy to living out the eucharist day by day than arguing about the finer points of its theology.

If you want biblical grounding for this, you need look no further than the wonderful Gospel reading we had this evening from the “Road to Emmaus” (Luke 24 v 13-35)

What always strikes me about this story is the transformation of the two disciples.

On the way to Emmaus, as they walk with the stranger, they are dispirited, sad, confused, dragging their feet but when, at supper, Jesus breaks the bread and reveals himself they are changed - for ever. Luke tells us that they “hurried back to Jerusalem” full of joy and even records their conversation “Did not our hearts burn within us as we travelled with him on the road”. As one of Caravaggio’s paintings of the Emmaus Supper show us these two disciples were transformed because they had encountered the Risen Jesus of the Eucharist.

And here is my central point this evening. The Eucharist should be a TRANSFORMING experience not a battle-ground Here we, like those disciples, should encounter the Risen Christ and then, with BURNING HEARTS, be sent out to bring news of that encounter to others

You and I - these days - are members of a Christian Church which values the eucharist and is able to provide more opportunities for taking part in it than any other church. We ought therefore to be a church which lives and breathes the presence of the Wounded and Risen Christ taking him into the most challenging corners of our society. A church which is indeed “sent out, to live and work to his praise and glory”

In my new parishes, I’m just converting a monthly non-Eucharistic family service into a eucharist (a more informal one, yes, than the other Sundays). And I’m doing that precisely because I believe that the eucharist can TRANSFORM people in a way that the family service does not.

In the last analysis, the Church is here to transform people’s lives and make us major contributors to the transformation of our society. I believe we can do this by taking the eucharist seriously and placing its CONSEQUENCES in the forefront of our minds.

What better aim could there be, on the Feast of Corpus Christi?