

**ST ETHELBERT'S CHURCH, LEOMINSTER
& ST JOSEPH'S, BROMYARD**

Parish Priest: Fr Paul Millar

Telephone: 01568 612238

Email: leominster@rcadc.org

14th June 2020: Feast of the Corpus Christi (The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ)

The Feast of Corpus Christi, which we celebrate today, complements the liturgy of Holy Thursday when Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. It arose in the Middle Ages as an expression of the faithful's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It was celebrated first as a local feast and then Pope Urban IV made it a universal feast in 1264. It became associated with processions through the towns and villages of Europe during which the monstrance, which contained the sacred host, was carried under a festive canopy and the crowds knelt, as the Blessed Sacrament passed, to receive the blessing.

I must admit that I feel a certain sadness that we cannot gather together on this feast to thank God for the great gift of the Eucharist and I am sure that many of you are longing to be nourished by the Lord's Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

This year, as we celebrate Corpus Christi in rather unusual circumstances, I remembered a CTS booklet titled 'Five loaves and two fish', which I read several years ago. The booklet is a series of moving meditations on the Eucharist by Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan which resulted from his own experience of suffering in difficult circumstances.

Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan. was born in 1928 in Vietnam. In 1975, at the age of forty-seven, Pope St Paul VI named him the Coadjutor Archbishop of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in Vietnam. During the brutal war, he was arrested by the communist forces. He was subsequently sent to prison where he remained for thirteen years, sometimes in solitary confinement, until his release in 1988. He was then kept under house arrest until 1991 when he was expelled from Vietnam.

In the meditations he speaks movingly of celebrating Mass secretly in his prison cell. Deprived of all his possessions, he wrote to friends asking for some medicine for his stomach. This was a codeword for the wine that he needed to celebrate the Mass. He also received some hosts, smuggled into the camp along with the wine. He wrote: "I will never be able to express my great joy! Every day, with three drops of wine and a drop of water in the palm of my hand, I would celebrate the Mass. This was my altar, and this was my cathedral! It was true medicine for soul and body, 'medicine of immortality, remedy so as not to die but to have life always in Jesus'. Through his celebration of the Mass in those difficult circumstances he united himself with the cross of Christ and renewed the offering of his life to Christ. He says, "The Eucharist became for me and for the other Christians in the prison a hidden and encouraging presence in the midst of all our difficulties. Jesus was adored secretly by the Christians who lived with me, just as happened so often in the prison camps of the twentieth century."

The knowledge that Christ was with him enabled him to reach out in charity to the communist guards at the prison. In an amusing anecdote he speaks about how he responded to the request of some of the guards to teach them Latin and I can imagine the smile on his face as he recalls how some of these guards went around the prison singing Latin hymns.

Although we are unable to gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we can still make a spiritual communion uniting ourselves, like Cardinal Van Thuan, to the Cross of Jesus and offer our lives to

him. Hopefully, when we can celebrate the Mass publicly, it will be with renewed faith and a greater understanding and appreciation of the great gift we have been given in the Eucharist.

When will our Churches be open?

Although we have received the good news that the Government has allowed churches in England to reopen for private prayer from Monday, it is not simply a case of opening the doors to let people in. I ask you to be patient while we make the necessary arrangements to ensure the safety of those who visit our churches. Those who have visited any of the local shops will be aware of the precautions and regulations we will have to comply with.

During the past week, I have ordered the necessary PPE equipment and I am still awaiting the delivery of some of the items. I also have to submit a rather lengthy risk assessment form to the Archbishop before he gives permission for the churches to be open. If, and when, that permission is received, the churches will be open for a limited period during the week and the number of people allowed in the church at any one time will have to be restricted.

Furthermore, in order to comply with the regulations we need a bank of stewards to guide visitors and to ensure social distancing is observed. We also need volunteers to clean the church according to the strict guidelines. I would like to thank those who have already offered to help in these areas and I will be in touch shortly to inform you of what is involved. If anyone else can help please let me know by email - leominster@rcadc.org or by phone. Sadly, offers to steward or clean cannot be accepted from those who have reached 70 years of age or have health issues.

God willing, we will be able to open the church doors in the not too distant future.

Supporting Your Parish Financially.

Once again I would like to thank you to those who have been concerned about how our parishes can keep going financially without the regular income from the collection. I am very grateful to those of you who have continued to donate by standing order, those who sent cheques and those who have put a donation through the letterbox.

The Archdiocese has now created a way that card donations can be made online to individual parishes through the Archdiocesan website. This online giving can be accessed from the homepage of the diocesan website under the heading: Support you parish during COVID-19 lockdown or from the main donations page at rcadc.org/donations

The instructions should be straightforward to follow and by clicking on the relevant parish you will be able to make an offertory donation via Virgin Giving.

I know that these are difficult times when many are experiencing financial difficulties and I do thank you for thinking about our parishes at this time.

Masses for this week

Although we cannot gather to celebrate the Mass, I will continue to pray for you all as I celebrate a private Mass each day at 12 noon. The mass intentions for this week are:

Sunday	The Body & Blood of Christ	People of our parishes
Monday		In Thanksgiving
Tuesday		Norman Burrill
Wednesday		
Thursday		Archbishop Peter Smith
Friday	Most Sacred Heart of Jesus	Private Intention
Saturday		Holy Souls

Pope Francis: Catechesis on Prayer

Last Wednesday, in his catechesis on Prayer, Pope Francis reflected on the prayer of Jacob and how prayer can change us. The Pope's reflection is now on the Vatican website and I have copied the reflection below for those who might have difficulty accessing the link.

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200610_udienza-generale.html

POPE FRANCIS GENERAL AUDIENCE Wednesday, 10 June 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

Let us continue with our catechesis on the subject of prayer. The Book of Genesis, through the occurrences of men and women of a far-off time, tells us stories that we can reflect on in our own lives. In the Patriarch Cycle, we also find that of a man who shrewdly developed his best talent: Jacob. The biblical account tells us about the difficult relationship Jacob had with his brother Esau. Ever since childhood, there was a rivalry between them, which was never overcome later on. Jacob is the second-born - they were twins - but through trickery he manages to obtain the blessing and birth right of their father Isaac (cf. Gen 25:19-34). It is only the first in a long series of ploys of which this unscrupulous man is capable. Even the name "Jacob" means someone who is cunning in his movements.

Forced to flee far from his brother, he seems to succeed in every undertaking in his life. He is adept at business: he greatly enriches himself, becoming the owner of an enormous flock. With tenacity and patience he manages to marry Laban's most beautiful daughter, with whom he is truly in love. Jacob – as we would say in modern terms – is a "self-made" man; with his ingenuity, his cunning, he manages to obtain everything he wants. But he lacks something. He lacks a living relationship with his own roots.

And one day he hears the call of home, of his ancient homeland, where his brother Esau, with whom he has always had a terrible relationship, still lives. Jacob sets out, undertaking a long journey with a caravan of many people and animals, until he reaches the final step, the Jabbok stream. Here the Book of Genesis offers us a memorable page (cf. 32:23-33). It describes that the patriarch, after having all of his people and all the livestock - and they were many - cross the stream, remains alone on the bank of the river on the foreign side. And he ponders: What awaits him the following day? What attitude will his brother Esau, from whom he stole his birth right, assume? Jacob's mind is a whirlwind of thoughts.... And, as it is getting dark, suddenly a stranger grabs him and begins to wrestle with him. The Catechism explains: "the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance" (CCC, 2573).

Jacob wrestles the entire night, never letting go of his adversary. In the end he is beaten, his sciatic nerve is struck by his opponent, and thereafter he will walk with a limp for the rest of his life. That mysterious wrestler asks the patriarch for his name and tells him: "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed" (Gen 32:28). As if to say: you will never be the man who walks this way, straight. He changes his name, he changes his life, he changes his attitude. You will be called Israel. Then Jacob also asks the other: "Tell me, I pray, your name". The other does not reveal it to him, but blesses him instead. Then Jacob understands he has encountered God "face to face" (vv. 29-30).

Wrestling with God: a metaphor for prayer. Other times Jacob has shown himself able to dialogue with God, to sense Him as a friendly and close presence. But that night, through a lengthy struggle

that nearly makes him succumb, the patriarch emerges changed. A change of name, a change in his way of life and a personality change: he comes out of it a changed man. For once he is no longer master of the situation - his cunning is no use to him - he is no longer a strategic and calculating man. God returns him to his truth as a mortal man who trembles and fears, because in the struggle, Jacob was afraid. For once Jacob has only his frailty and powerlessness, and also his sins, to present to God. And it is this Jacob who receives God's blessing, with which he limps into the promised land: vulnerable and wounded, but with a new heart. Once I heard an elderly man - a good man, a good Christian, but a sinner who had great trust in God - who said: "God will help me; He will not leave me alone. I will enter Heaven; limping, but I will enter". First he was a self-assured man; he trusted in his own shrewdness. He was a man impervious to grace, immune to mercy; he did not know what mercy was. "Here I am, I am in command!". He did not think he was in need of mercy. But God saved what had been lost. He made him understand that he was limited, that he was a sinner who was in need of mercy, and He saved him.

We all have an appointment during the night with God, in the night of our life, in the many nights of our life: dark moments, moments of sin, moments of disorientation. And there we have an appointment with God, always. He will surprise us at the moment we least expect, when we find ourselves truly alone. That same night, struggling against the unknown, we will realize that we are only poor men and women - "poor things", I dare say - but right then, in that moment in which we feel we are "poor things", we need not fear: because God will give us a new name, which contains the meaning of our entire life; He will change our heart and He will offer us the blessing reserved to those who have allowed themselves to be changed by Him. This is a beautiful invitation to let ourselves be changed by God. He knows how to do it, because He knows each one of us. "Lord, You know me", every one of us might say. "Lord, You know me. Change me".

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