

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26

1 John 4:11-16

John 17:11-19

*So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and they who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.*— the first letter of St John, the fourth chapter and the sixteenth verse.

+In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dearest Owen and Edward, and Vera and George,

You are not usually here for this part of the service; you come in a little later, in time to come up to the front for a blessing from Fr Peter (who is Edward's dad) or Fr Jarred (who is Owen's) or some other priest. I can't speak for them, but it is one of my very favourite things in the world to do, to tell you that you are blessed, because of course you are, and I hope that you know it and feel it in your bones. I will miss it too, even though this is better, of course it is: giving you, not just God's blessing, but *God*.

That's what it means, you know, when your mom and dad come up to the front, and instead of words whispered, they receive a piece of bread and a sip of wine: the body and blood of Christ, we say to them, just as you will hear for yourselves from now on. It is an unusual thing, on so many levels: how can this bread and wine be Christ's body and blood? And why would we want to eat and drink it, if so? It is very hard to explain; not because you are too little to understand, but because it is too big a thing for anyone to express in words.

Love often is too big for words. This is why we don't just say "I love you", as important as that is to say: we kiss the people we love, and cuddle them, holding them as closely to us as we can. If it sometimes feels like your mom and dad squeeze you too tightly, now you know why. They love you so so much, and want to be as close to you as possible. And so it is with the bread and the wine, in a funny sort of way. God offers us himself—as a baby in a manger, as a man on a cross, even as food—so that God can be more than just near us, but *in* us so that we can also be in him, as we heard in the second reading earlier.

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Vera and George, Owen and Edward,

You might not remember getting baptised: not many children do. There might be photographs to fill in the details, but basically happened was that someone picked you up from your mom and dad, held you and poured some water on your head. And then you probably cried because you weren't expecting to be splashed: and that would've been very funny. People would have clapped and laughed and cried with joy.

I'm not meant to be talking about baptism today, but it is your baptism that led you to this day of your first communion, and I want to remind you of your baptism, even if you can't remember the day it happened. I don't really know how to express how important this is, that you are baptised; that too is beyond words. It means a lot of things, and one of the things it does mean is that you—all four of you—and me and Fr Peter and loads of other people here in this church but also all over the world are one big family. And one of the most important things that families do together is that we eat together. God knows that children are very annoying to eat with, because you are very picky and messy, and won't stop asking questions when all

grown ups want is some peace and quiet at the end of a long day. All the same, it's an important thing for families to do, because food gives us life, and so the sharing of food together is also the sharing of our lives with one another.

That's also what's happening here, when you eat the bread and drink the wine: you are doing what families do, with everyone everywhere who does this thing that Jesus gave to us to do. I know—as you will soon discover—that it is not strawberries or sushi or sausages, nor is it served with cheese, nor dipped in chocolate, and you might well wonder, why not?, to which I say, “Good question: ask Fr Peter after the service”. But there is a point, I think, in the fact that we are not all having our own favourite foods here: instead, we are having the *same* food, a sign of our being together in the same family.

So, this gift that God has given us—this thing that you are now going to do for the first time, that we call *holy communion* or the *eucharist* or the *mass*—is both about God loving us enough to want to live in us, as well as about God loving us enough to give us to each other: and it is in loving one another that we will

understand more and more what it means to love God and to be loved by God.

That's probably all I should have said, instead of babbling on for a few minutes.

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Edward, Vera, George, Owen: I hope that whenever you eat this bread and drink this wine, that you will remember both that God loves you more than words can say, and that we do too, your gigantic adopted family, who are so so happy that you are here with us at last.

+In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.