

## **Corpus Christi 2017**

**Fr Peter Groves**

What a week to be celebrating the Body of Christ. On the one hand, the reality of human embodiment has been brought home to us in images and imaginings of unspeakable horror, as we share our grief and our shock at the Grenfell Tower fire. Horror has quickly and understandably turned to anger, a reminder that to be human is to be materially and physically responsive to what happens around us and to us. But this week has also seen the first anniversary of another horror, the murder of the MP Jo Cox, whose memory has inspired so many to emphasise that coming together in love and celebrating all we have in common is essential to human flourishing.

The Body of Christ means more than one thing. It means the coming together of the many millions of people who make up the church, in heaven as well as on earth. But it also means the coming together of humanity in all its material and physical

limitations, with the boundless and inexhaustible love of God. That coming together is what we call the incarnation, and it is celebrated and shown forth among us every time we offer the holy sacrifice of thanksgiving which we call the eucharist.

It is vital for us to recognise that neither of those applications of embodiment, neither meaning of the body of Christ, is something abstract. The body of Christ is far from abstract. It is real, and it is particular. Christianity is not about abstracts, it is about things, and in this case about the particular redeeming presence of God in Jesus Christ, divine and human. It is precisely because of our inability to articulate the meaning of what it is to be divine that God comes among us and transforms our world – and within it, the things that we say – to unite it with himself. The presence of Christ which we celebrate is not something static, something limited to an object or a place. It is the presence among us of the eternal offering of the Son to the Father, what we celebrate in the eucharist is our

being drawn up into the worship of heaven, our being enabled to share in the very life of God, a life of perfect self-giving in love, the life which we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Trinity which we celebrated last week.

The miracle of the eucharist is the miracle of God's creative act, because in order for us to live, to exist at all, we depend entirely on the creative love of God. The story of redemption is the story of that love lived out in a human life, offered once and for all in the whole of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, so that human life can at last fulfil its destiny and enjoy the communion with God for which it was created.

That new life is not something future, but something present, and it is given to us day by day and week by week in the miracle of the eucharist. We depend on the love of God, on the broken body of Christ, for our very lives. When life goes so badly wrong, as we have seen happen so frequently and so desperately among us in recent weeks, we are reminded that the body of Christ is the

combination of limitation and lordship, the coming together of broken humanity in the crucified Christ with the infinite victory which is the eternal life of the resurrection and of Easter.

In the midst of life we are in death, the liturgy tells us. But it is also true that in the midst of death we are in life. Not just because human beings show such remarkable abilities to love and to help each other, though that is important. As Christians we believe that that ability, that grace, is the image of God in humanity, the same outpouring of love which we see incarnated in Jesus Christ, and given as the life of the world in the sacrament of the eucharist.

And so Corpus Christi is a celebration of love, a celebration of the materiality, the physicality, of God become human, of God with us in Jesus Christ. In the darkest of times we boldly shine the light of this strangest of truths, that the God who made the heavens and the earth gives himself without reserve for love of you and me, that the one who

frames and sustains the heavens is the one who is broken and poured out for the stupid, selfish, sinful pride of every single one of us. It's not rational, it's not sensible, it's not convenient. But it is true. Thank God that God is among us. Because we need Him very badly.