

**Corpus Christi Sunday
14 June 2009**

Our Lady & All Saints, Otley

Canon Tom O'Connor's Golden Jubilee

On occasions like this I sometimes realise only at the very end of the ceremony, that one of my tasks is to congratulate the person at the centre of it all, in this case Canon Tom O'Connor, your Parish Priest. So first may I say, on behalf of everyone here, how delighted I am that we are able to be together today to mark in style his 50 years of priesthood. Warm congratulations to you and prayers for you, Fr Tom.

The feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, more familiarly otherwise known by many as Corpus Christi, is a great day to have a celebration like this. I'm sure that very many of us can remember our own First Communion on this day – mine was made at the parish church in Banbury, and afterwards we went for a picnic in some nearby woods. And, of course, the sun shone as it always did in those days! I suppose Fr Tom's First Communion would have been about 65 years ago; his family and friends would have been there; the celebrant would have been his Parish Priest (revered, of course!). Even today he will remember it.

When we receive this sacrament for the first time it hopefully marks the beginning of a very significant development: a growing *awareness* of God's presence in our lives, a growing *understanding* of what this presence means; and in this way a growing *faith*. It is the start of a lifelong process. For everybody it is a process which is part of our gradual awareness of how God is calling us, in other words of our vocation. To be called by God to the priesthood or religious life is one of very many privileged vocations.

So let's all of us who share in this celebration today reflect on how God may be calling us. In the course of our lives we make lots of promises. Like all promises they are binding. We make them to each other and for each other, and we make them to God. We should also be aware that God may have further plans for us that

are not yet clear. It is this awareness, understanding and faith that will have led Fr Tom to the priesthood.

As we mark this moment let me say that that it is an occasion for those of you whose calling by God is not yet clear, to be especially open to the possibility that he is calling you to the priesthood or the religious life. These are immensely worthwhile and demanding callings. To answer such a call requires great generosity on your part as well as on the part of your parents.

Let's reflect briefly on the gospel we heard a few moments ago. It was Mark's account of the Last Supper. This was the Jewish Passover meal. It was the annual celebration of the liberation of the Jewish people from a long and arduous slavery. Although it happened only once it is rightly remembered every year. Times and scenes are different, but the need to be freed from our own slaveries, whatever they may be, is still there.

Part of the gift of the Eucharist is that it provides the food for our journey through life. You remember how the prophet Elijah walked forty days in the desert, sustained by the food God gave him. At the end of the journey he found God and gained strength for the task God had for him. The task we each have will be different, but we can be sure God does truly have something marked out for us to do – each of us has a unique purpose in life. I've always loved that prayer of Cardinal Newman that includes this brief extract: "God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission – I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next". The food for this journey of ours is the Eucharist.

The centre piece of the Last Supper, as we heard a moment ago, was the institution for us of the Eucharist. "As they were eating he took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them. 'Take it,' he said, 'this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them, and all drank from it, and he said to them, 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many.' This was Christ's last will and testament, and we must never allow ourselves to become dulled to what he says.

As a kind of codicil to this tiny reflection I suggest for you a few points of reflection about the Eucharist, about our communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord.

- The Eucharist is for our healing, so that what is sick or weak in us may be healed and made whole.
- The Eucharist is for our faith, for its deepening and strengthening, so that we may say confidently, like the father of the sick child 'Lord I believe, help what little faith I have.'; and like St Thomas say: 'My Lord and my God'
- The Eucharist is for our consolation and forgiveness, so that if we are burdened by sin, we may be touched again by God's intimate presence to us. Like the woman who was a sinner, we can hear those wonderful words, 'Go your way and sin no more.'
- The Eucharist is a treasure we may continually explore, confident that however profoundly we search there is always a greater depth of understanding and enrichment to be found. As one of the saints said: 'Let us seek so as to find, and having found let us continue our search.'
- The Eucharist is food for our journey, giving us the strength, courage, hope, and confidence to continue day by day on our journey. At the end it is the food for our final journey, when we are about to begin that new life, that 'eye has not seen, nor ear heard'.

It's good to be able today to be with Fr Tom to promise our prayers, to be witnesses to his happiness and to wish him and all the Parish every future joy and blessing.

+ David Konstant
Bishop Emeritus of Leeds