

## **SERMON FOR CORPUS CHRISTI :14 JUNE 2020**

### **John 6:51-58 : Behold what you are – Become what you receive**

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Beloved, I trust that you are all well and staying safe during level 3 of our national lockdown. History teaches us that there once lived a great theologian and teacher of the faith and he was also a Bishop of the church in a town in North Africa. His name was Augustine and he was later included in the numbers of the great saints.

He once preached a sermon in which he links the bread of the Eucharist (the body of Christ) to those who receive it, who are members of the church and also the body of Christ. He said “Behold what you are; become what you receive.”

Behold what you are : If we read Paul’s 1st letter to the Corinthian church chapter 12:27 we find that he says “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” So, what are we? We are the Body of Christ.

Become what you receive: Our understanding is that the Eucharist truly is the Body and Blood of Jesus. Why do we believe this? We believe it because it is written in God’s Word. In chapter 6 of John’s Gospel we read that Jesus said to the crowd of people who came out to see him: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

He further added: “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.”

If we read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke as well as the 1st letter of Paul to the Corinthians we find that Jesus shared an intimate meal with his disciples on the night he was betrayed where he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

So, what do we receive at the Eucharist? The body and blood of Jesus.

So, we are the body of Christ and we receive body of Christ. “Behold what you are; become what you receive.”

Generally, bread is understood to nourish and sustain us for a journey. And friends, we are on a spiritual journey together with God. So, receiving the body and blood of Christ then nourishes and sustains us for our spiritual journey. When Jesus was speaking to the crowd and said to them that they must feed on him, he did not intend for his word to be taken literally – he was not referring to a physical feeding for the moment but a spiritual feeding for a lifetime.

Today we commemorate the Great Festival of Corpus Christi. The term Corpus Christi is derived from Latin meaning Body of Christ (corpus=body and Christi=Christ).

In today's 2nd scripture reading we recall the words we say so often after the Lord's Prayer. The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Do we really take to heart what we say when we say this – we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Note the repetition of the word one. In our Collect Prayer today, we pray we may be empowered by the love of Jesus Christ to be one. This one-ness means unity – it means community. It means relationship. It means we here at Anglican Parish of Germiston are one community of faith. Yes, we have St Boniface, St Mary and St John and St Mark's – but the truth is that we are ONE. If we then truly say we are one body, then we our collective life as community should reflect this. Beloved it is my prayer that there should be no talk of "us" and "them". We may worship together under the names of these Patron Saints but we are one congregation – we are one faith community as the Parish of Germiston.

Is Christ's body divided? No. Christ's death on the cross broke down any/all divisions of race, class, gender. Through the sacrificial blood of Jesus we are healed of any divisions but our community life ought to reflect this truth. A few weeks ago, I preached on Jesus' Great Priestly prayer where I emphasized that Jesus prayed that we may be one as He and the Father are one. This speaks of Unity.

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

The church is the body of Christ and the church is not the building – it is the community of believers – you and me.

How are we being the Body of Christ to others? How are we clothing ourselves in Christ and reflecting Christ to others through our thoughts, our motivations, words, attitudes, actions and behaviour?

Do we see the image of God in the other person and do we honor that Image of God by how we relate to that person?

St Gregory is quoted as saying "If the Sacrament of the Lord's Passion is to work its effect in us, we must imitate what we receive and proclaim to humankind what we receive."

Finally, I wish to conclude by further developing the idea of us being the Body of Christ as it relates to God's Mission. Jesus said to his disciples "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." We are a people of Mission. This is best expressed in the words of Teresa of Avila who said: Christ has no body but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes through which he looks with

Compassion on this world, Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,

Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

On this day of Corpus Christi may we, being fed and nourished in the Eucharist, truly be Christ's body in Anglican Parish of Germiston and in our communities and neighbourhoods. What positive contribution will you make? Beloved "Behold what you are; become what you receive." May God bless you. AMEN.