



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Corpus Christi-Year B

Readings: Exodus 24: 3-8, Psalm 115, Hebrews 9: 11-15, Mark 14: 12-16. 22-26

I came across a delightful greetings card recently which simply raised the question, on its cover,

‘What if the Hokey Cokey is what it’s all about?’

This is, of course, an unusually Catholic sentiment.

The Hokey Cokey is, according to one theory, a song gently lampooning the priest’s actions in the Mass.

You put your right arm in Your right arm out In, out, in, out You shake it all about (The threefold blessing/sign of the Cross)

You do the hokey cokey (HOC EST ENIM CORPUS) And you turn around, in the days when the priest faced the right way, (Present the Host to the people for adoration) That's what it's all about

Woah, the hokey cokey Woah, the hokey cokey Woah, the hokey cokey (the threefold liturgical recitation) Knees bent (Genuflect) Arms stretched (Eucharistic prayer and the greater elevation) Ra-ra-ra

A parody of the actions of the Priest in the Consecration at the Mass.

So the question on the card is a good one. What if the Hokey Cokey is what it’s all about?

To the parodiers, the Mass is an incomprehensible jumble of gestures and accumulated superstition surrounding the ridiculous assertion that

somewhere on this stone table a piece of biscuit and a drop of fortified wine, by the gyrations of an oddly garbed man, is mysteriously translated into the body of a dead Jew and the Presence of the power behind everything that ever was or is or will be. Barking mad, clearly.

Of course the Mass is more than this absurdly reductionist summary. For even the least Catholic Christian, it has at least a symbolism beyond the simple fabric of the physicality of the matter in hand and the potential for its transubstantiation. We see this prefigured in today's Old Testament reading. The People have heard the Word of God and pledged themselves to Him. When Moses takes the blood (the very sign of life) from the sacrifice (the thing that makes holy – that joins Man to God) he flings half of it on the altar, the locus of the sacrifice and the meeting point of the divine and the human. God Himself is thus bound into this contract, this oath, this sacramentum. The other half of the life force of blood Moses flings over the people who have covenanted with God, thus binding them into the divine life beyond the sticky reality of the physical here and now.

Absent from the lection is the next and key verses of this revelatory moment. We are told that Moses and the elders are then invited into the mountain where, on a pavement of sapphire, they saw God and ate and drank. This is the prefiguring of the Mass, the table of the communion born of the sacrifice of the covenant. Beyond the Rood Screen, the sanctuary represents Heaven where the elders, the presbyters come and go. The altar rails, at which we used to kneel, the boundary across which the Heavenly gift is given to the church on earth. Through this mystery and mystical experience Man is invited into the Eternal Presence. The physical gifts become the gateway to the spiritual reality.

For those who deny anything beyond the physical this cannot be understood. They remain marooned on the everyday outward signs, unaware of the dimensions of the transcendent reality of which these gifts

are the portal. Without a recognition of the spiritual dimension the whole thing remains inaccessible and incomprehensible, a meaningless mummery rather than the cosmic key.

Of course even the greatest enemies of the sacrament recognise its potency. The great atheistic regimes persecute because they recognise the danger of this covenant that recognises a higher authority than their transient tyrannies. At the other end of the spectrum of hostile powers, allied to the same Satanic lord, the servants of the dark break into the tabernacles to steal and abuse the sacred species because they are acutely aware of the Real Presence therein. Would that all Christians had as much confidence and conviction of that truth.

The real reality is that, even in this most secular age, most people recognise, as the myriad generations of their forebears, that Man is not solely a conjunction of matter and energy but has a spiritual dimension – which is seldom articulated except in the haziest of terms. What the Hokey Cokey does is to declare that supervening reality and point insistently to where it is to be found and the means by which, those bound by the life blood of the sacrifice, may ascend the holy mountain and commune with the divine.

‘Hoc est enim Corpus’ is indeed what it’s all about.