



The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ Year A (Corpus Christi) - Knoxian Presbyterianism or The Catholic Christ

Homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: Deuteronomy 8:2-3,14b-16a; Ps 147:1 Corinthians 10:16-17; John 6:51-58

It was the 1960s – the decade of revolutions.

It was the decade when a lot of well-heeled upper middle class students took to the streets of Western Europe to overthrow the very economic order that had nurtured them and to loudly embrace the murderous creed of atheistic Marxism.

The smug philanderer and Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, announced the growing triumph of the 'Permissive Society' which was to cost the nation dear in terms of broken lives, fatherless children and family disintegration. But he was not alone.

The Contraceptive pill was put on the NHS for general availability, thereby underpinning the sexual revolution, by an unlikely enthusiast for promiscuity, one Enoch Powell, then Minister of Health.

The Wolfenden Report set us out on the long road which would eventually lead to the current questioning of the very nature of our identity and biology.

Betty Friedan an American Jewish Marxist, published her groundbreaking book, *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 which would set the international Feminist revolution on an aggressively godless route.

While the Death Penalty for the guilty was suspended in 1965 and

abolished in 1969, the same Parliament, at the behest of the young son of a Scottish pastor, David Steele, moved overwhelmingly to condemn millions of innocents to death by the Abortion Law of 1967.

In England Bishop John Robinson published 'Honest to God' – a modernist blockbuster which would set the sceptical tone in theological studies for the next forty years. Ironically Robinson himself would later become a Biblical conservative and find himself treated as a pariah by the new establishment that he had done so much to encourage.

Meanwhile, the Church herself was not immune to seismic shock and radical change in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. A process which has continued unabated for the last sixty years and absorbed and then defrayed much of the Church's energy.

Ireland began that descent into anarchy which would characterise a resurgence of 'The Troubles'. One of the enduring characters of that unhappy time was 'Dr.' Ian Paisley. A radical Protestant leader in Belfast and regular Catholic-baiter, Paisley was invited to speak at a televised debate at the Oxford Union.

At the height of his speech, delivered, as ever, in a 'fortissimo' rant with every syllable given its full weight, Paisley produced a Priest's host. To the gasps, laughter and cheers of the assembled students, he began to mock the absurd notion of the Real Presence. It was, he suggested, 'idolatry' and 'blasphemy' to worship what was merely a biscuit over which 'a bachelor priest', said with a knowing sneer, had waved his hands.

Paisley, of course, was merely repeating the long Presbyterian line from the Reformation onwards. The Mass was a blasphemy. Nothing happened to the elements of Bread & Wine. Nobody should kneel before this fraudulent confection and Romish deceit. It was not the Body of Christ. Paisley echoed the teaching of that ghastly and terminally miserable Scotsman, John Knox, whose time at the court of the Protestant boy-king, Edward VI, had been formative for the newly created political vehicle for the establishment, the Church of England. There had been much heated debate about whether to kneel for Communion or not. Knox and his Presbyterian pals wanted to sit. Kneeling, they argued, would suggest that something had happened to

the bread at the consecration whereas it was clearly just bread. A compromise was struck. People would still kneel to receive, but merely as a sign of gratitude for Jesus which was, in no way, to imply His Real Presence. This devastating and conclusive compromise was enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer and known as 'The Black Rubric'.

Catholics believed it was Jesus.

Protestants thought of it as an aide memoire but essentially a biscuit.

Fast forward four hundred odd years. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council huge changes to the liturgy of the Mass were introduced – hardly any of which were actually mandated by the Council itself.

Great altars were abandoned to become mere shelves for flower vases and were replaced by interim 'tea trolley' style altars at the head of the nave. The orientation of the priest was reversed. He no longer led his people before God at the Altar of Sacrifice but 'presided' over the family table. Immanence trumped Transcendence.

The holy language of the Church, Latin, was replaced wholesale and contrary to the decisions of the Council, by the vernacular. The Council mandated that Latin was to be preserved. The congregation should be able to sing or say all the Latin parts of the Mass. In practice it was dumped. The vernacular could be permitted for the readings and the prayers alone. In practice it took over.

Gregorian chant was to retain pride of place in the music of the liturgy.

None of this survived the post-conciliar tide of revolution.

The Laity would now receive the Blessed Sacrament in the hand and not on the tongue.

Taking replaced receiving. And there would be no kneeling at the Altar rails, which symbolically marked the borderline between the Church on Earth, the Heavenly Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies, the Tabernacle, the dwelling place of the Presence. Indeed in many churches the Tabernacle was shuffled off to a side chapel thus removing the final symbolic nod to the layout of the Jerusalem Temple and obscuring the centrality of the Presence. Indeed the altar rails were unceremoniously ripped out and people were to make their devotions and consume the Body of Christ while walking. In that simple act of modernist vandalism those brief and precious moments for preparation, focus, devotion and reflection were taken away. None of this was even considered, never mind mandated at the Second Vatican Council. The later cobbled-

together explanation for this additional iconoclasm was to claim that the first Passover was eaten on the move by a pilgrim people. But that is not what the Scripture says.

The Hebrews were to be ready for the journey to the Promised Land. But nowhere does it suggest that the sacrifice of the Lamb, whose blood turns away the Angel of Death from their homes, should be eaten while walking - as a kind of 'fast food'. And no Jew has ever kept Passover like that – including Jesus.

Here in this church much of the profound and ancient symbolism has been restored. Thanks to the determination of Fr Keith and the generosity of the anonymous donors, we have had restored a real stone altar – replacing the temporary matchwood of the forty interim years and a beautiful but open screen to the Holy of Holies.

Thanks to Fr Ciaran, Philip Chatfield, our stonemason, and other donors, we now have the tabernacle on the Altar of the Martyrs in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel – a fitting place for the Blessed Sacrament to repose and be adored. From others, gifts of sacred vestments fit for the court of the King of Kings and His glory.

Is it too much to dream that one day we may once again have the opportunity to enjoy those few precious moments at the rail, the Temple restored, contemplating the Presence and receiving Him across the sacred borderline of Heaven and Earth?

We, who still can, kneel before the Blessed Sacrament to affirm our belief in the Real Presence. And we, who can no longer kneel, kneel in our hearts before Him. So we prepare at every Mass. **From** the consecration and the descent of the Holy Spirit, **At** the greater elevation of the Host, **In** the solemn recognition of the Agnus Dei, **On** the slow walk in the queue, **With** the people in front of us whom we pray for and all those on our hearts we bring with us, **humble and thankful** in the genuflection of the heart. Not for us the bloodless Paisleyite biscuit of the real absence.

We are here for Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ, to receive in awe the death defying food of Passover, Bread of Heaven, Blood of the Lamb, Medicine of Immortality -

THE REAL PRESENCE – CHRIST HIMSELF.

ALLELUIA . AMEN.