

St Mary's Church, Dorchester, Thursday 19th June 2025 i.e. Corpus Christi.

Genesis 14:18-20

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 6:51-58

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Recently I gave blood for the first time. The donation venue was the hall at the United Church, here in Dorchester. I imagine people giving blood for the first time go through similar emotions. I felt a bit of anxiety about drinking enough fluids; there are the sensations of actual and figurative “pins and needles” that you get; and of course I didn't really want to look at the needle going in...

In situations like that, you want to distract yourself. I allowed my attention to wander. Since it's a functioning church hall most of the time, I found myself looking at the characteristically churchy displays dotted on all of the walls. There were posters about local and foreign missions; a display about the church's eco credentials; some pieces of children's artwork... And last but not least, right in the middle of the hall – in fact directly in front of where I was reclining – there was a big empty wooden cross. (It says something about my advanced state of distraction that it was probably the last thing I noticed.)

When I did finally notice the cross, I thought to myself, “Well there's a sermon for Passiontide or Corpus Christi this year.”

Jesus Christ, fully divine and fully human, gives us his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. His blood is shed for the forgiveness of sins: shed, in other words, in a conscious echo of the ceremonies by which the High Priests of ancient Judaism made atonement for themselves and for God's people. And here I was, reclining in moderate discomfort beneath a memorial to that his precious death and passion.

My sacrifice and Jesus' were similar enough to make a joke out of it, but not really the same at all. I was not in the United Church hall shedding my blood for forgiveness. Nor – I hope – were the good people of the transfusion team taking my blood for patients to drink. I suppose I was in a very real sense trying to save some of my fellow human beings. But like those ancient blood sacrifices I've mentioned my sacrifice is one that I will have to do over and over again for it to be effective. Jesus on the other hand shed his blood once and for all – he is still donating, and we are still receiving out

of his gift.

According to Catholic Christianity there are three steps in the process of salvation. There's that difficult first step where a human being has to stop resisting grace – they have to choose to go along with God's will for them; we call that justification. The second part is sanctification, where the Holy Spirit begins cooperating with us, gradually making us more good, and making us want to be more good, and to want that more. And the third step is simple perseverance in that sanctification – simply growing closer to God forever.

The Eucharist, which we celebrate – and celebrate – this evening is the sacrament of perseverance. It is our food for the journey. Jesus' body and blood are true food and true drink. As we depend more on Jesus, especially through times of suffering, we become ever more like him in his crucified and glorified humanity.

In a few moments time, in addition to what would otherwise be a perfectly normal celebration of the Eucharist, we will have a chance to adore Jesus Christ in his eucharistic presence. We will say a few words together; we will have the opportunity to sit or to stand or to kneel in the presence of Jesus' divine majesty. I invite you to use that time in whatever way you need to; but I exhort you: adore him. Adore him more and more.

Jesus bled for us, and we are still receiving out of his gift. May we never stop receiving him.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.