

Triduum Præpar. 195

28.5.70

10.6.71

1.6.72

Ave Verum (Byrd)

## EUCCHARIST PREFACE

[Byrd - Contemp.]

On Sunday next, instead of today, we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi. The reason for the transfer is (the same) one I've already explained a number of times, on other occasions. But this Thursday, in the general calendar, remains as it has been since the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the ~~Church's~~ <sup>Church's</sup> annual special celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Until the abolition (last year) of the rather redundant Octave of Pentecost, Corpus Christi was always the first Thursday following the completion of Eastertide — it was Thursday, because of the association of the Eucharist and its institution by Our Lord with the celebration of Holy Thursday in the context of Our Lord's Passover. So, really, this special feast-day is only taking up once again, with more undivided attention, one aspect of the meaning of Holy Thursday: a kind of amplified ecdo. affording the opportunity of contemplating the mystery of the Eucharist at greater leisure. In another sense, of course, every Mass is a celebration of our Lord's gift of Himself to His Church; and this is remarked in the document of Pope Urban IV instituting the Feast of Corpus Christi, in which he also refers to the other preoccupations of Holy Thursd. which make it desirable to have a special solemnity for the Blessed Eucharist. One reason he gives is that this feast-day may, as it were, make up in devotion and solemnity for what may perhaps have been neglected in other celebrations of Mass. This point, I think, wd. be a fruitful one to bear in mind next Sunday — to try to make our own participation in the Eucharist on this occasion something different from the usual Sunday Mass, more fervent, more full and open, more aware of the mystery of God's

love and His presence with us. This may be all the more necessary now, with all the changes that have recently taken place in the Mass liturgy and when, maybe, their point and significance has not yet been sufficiently brought home to us. There's also the fact you may be aware of, that there's a lot of writing and talking about the Eucharist being done these days, some of it undoubtedly way-out and (dare I say it?) possibly bordering on the heretical; there is a certain dissatisfaction with the present form of the Mass, on a number of grounds; and there has been a general and gradual shift of emphasis to other aspects of the Eucharist, the Mass and the Sacrament, than were stressed up to about 20 or 15 yrs. ago. In a way, we have been drawing on an older understanding of our devotion to the Eucharist than what the feast of Corpus Christi both popularly expressed and encouraged & developed over the centuries. There is, for instance, a greater personal participation in the Eucharist today than was usual in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when adoration was perhaps more common an attitude. If there seems to be a move away from what might be called a static conception of the Eucharist, this doesn't mean any decline in the Church's faith in Christ's presence in this sacrament — just as the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi was not the beginning of the Church's faith in the Real Presence. Perhaps it's worth recalling also that there was a lot of opposition to the introduction of Corpus Christi and it was more than 50 yrs after Urban IV's initiative before this feast was generally accepted. Between now and Sunday it would be good to reflect in prayer on our faith in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and our understanding of the Mass.



(Byrd-Cantory)

Before our formal prayer today, let's listen to a well-known Eucharistic hymn, more familiar probably in more romantic musical settings, Ave Verum: this version of it is by the early 17th century English catholic composer, Peter Philipps. MUSIC - PRAYERS

In Europe,

and elsewhere, the feast of Corpus Christi did become one of the most popular festivals of the year, mainly on account of the procession with the Bl. Sacrament which became a prominent part of the celebration and developed into a most splendid affair, with the whole community taking part enthusiastically in this manifestation of faith & devotion. In certain, mainly rural, parts of Europe this continues even today, to the gaping incomprehension of modern-day tourists for whom colourful pictures of quaint customs <sup>often</sup> ~~are~~ seem far more <sup>attractive</sup> important than Christian faith. The origin of this procession is probably in the much older Holy Tuesday procession to the Altar of Repose after Mass, though in England there was a procession of the Bl. Sac. on Palm Sunday from the 11th century on. But Corpus Christi (why is it there has never been a proper English name for this feast, like the French 'Fête-Dieu', feast of God, or the German 'feast of the Body of our Lord'?), Corpus Christi was already well established before the procession became an integral part of the celebration. Now these customs have changed: if there is less of spectacle <sup>or festivity,</sup> there is also more of what you might call a literal understanding and celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi — and this after all is the purpose of Christ's presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist, that He gives His flesh so that the world may live. "Whoever eats my flesh & drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him"