

13. 6. 68

(Corpus Christi)

6. 6. 69

Ave Verum (Pl. 2)

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'Ave verum', 'Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary'. This 16th century hymn, well-known in more sophisticated settings than the ^{original chant version} ~~one~~ you've just heard, was for singing just after the consecration & elevation of the sacred host at Mass. It dates from the time when growing popular devotion to the Presence of Christ in the ^{Blessed Eucharist} ~~consecrated~~ gave rise to numerous hymns & prayers in honour of the Blessed sacrament, and to the feast of Corpus Christi which we celebrate today. This feast, in high summer (in the Europe of the Middle Ages anyway), with its joy and colour, flowers & processions is really an echo, taking up again to celebrate with more undivided attention, what we celebrated in the Liturgy of Holy Week, in the full context of Christ's redeeming Passover — His last Supper on Holy Thursday. Corpus Christi, literally, the Body of Christ (though the title of today's feast is left in ^{many} ~~most~~ languages in the Latin) stresses the Real Presence of Christ in the action of the Mass when we carry out Christ's injunction to "Do this in memory of me". The processions, through villages, towns & countryside which became so popular in the old countries of Europe and are still a ^{notable} feature of their celebration of Corpus Christi (to the incomprehension and faint amusement of modern materialist tourists) ^{are} ~~are~~ an act of homage & worship to Christ present among his people, an act of faith in the mysterious reality of His presence at Mass and in the Blessed Sacrament, under the appearance of ordinary bread & wine. Nowadays the old customs in religious practice, as in other fields, are dying or changing — processions in honour of the Bl. Sacrament are not so popular among us or so understandable in modern pluralist societies.

So we've to look for new means of expressing our faith - devotion to Christ present among us in this Sign, sacrament of His great love. Meanwhile, it's our personal meditation & prayer, in union with Christ, which must develop & strengthen our faith. Let us pray now, with this intention. PRAYERS.

Pope Gregory (the Great...?) byrd
es 58

Let's listen now to ^{a very} ~~part~~ familiar part of another ^{processional} hymn in honour of the Bl. Sacrament: Come, adore His wondrous Presence! Bow to Christ, the source of grace! Here is kept the ancient promise of God's earthly dwelling-place! Sight is blind before God's glory, faith alone may see His face!

Corpus Christi used to be a day of obligation for Catholics to be present at Mass. Now it's not: and, besides the custom of holding processions at this time dropping out, the once popular devotion of Benediction has also, over the past few years, become less & less frequent or popular. Even before the fairly recent prohibition of giving Benediction immediately after Mass, most Catholics did not wait for this 'extra' after their Sunday & feast-day Mass. There are people who lament these developments or are worried by them. They may have some cause; but, parallel to this, there has of course been a renewal in people's understanding and appreciation of what remains the central act of worship and devotion of the Christian life, the Eucharistic Assembly, which we call the Mass. In recent times, there's been a return to the Eucharist as the sacrament to be received. The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is for us: He's there, in His body & blood, to be the food of our lives — not, indeed, that this

had ever been forgotten, but for various historical - social reasons, the stress in our faith in Christ's presence, has been at times on different aspects of its reality. People receive Holy Communion much more frequently today than, probably, at any time for the past few centuries. The meaning of the Eucharist as a Paschal Banquet, to which we are all invited by Christ & whom He gives us the bread of life and the bond that makes us all one with Him; this is the more recent way of understanding the Presence of Christ in His sacrament - and, of course, it's also the very ancient understanding. Christ himself spoke of life with Him & His Father as a banquet, a shared meal. One of the most beautiful antiphons, written in the very Middle Ages which made the Corpus Christi devotion popular, speaks again of the Banquet. It's Thomas Aquinas' "O Sacram Communionis" - O sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his passion is brought to mind, our minds are filled with grace & love, and a pledge is given of our future glory.