

Ave Verum
(Rogert)

THIL. O. 1572

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Maybe you're more likely to hear that music these days either in a concert hall or, perhaps, at a wedding in a Catholic church — at least, it used to be rather a favourite wedding piece. Actually of course the hymn itself is a Eucharist one, dating (I believe) from that time in the European Middle Ages when there was a great upsurge of special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and a whole collection of hymns and songs in honour of Christ and His presence in the Eucharist were produced, and a number of them got into the regular liturgy of the Church. St Thomas Aquinas wrote a number of prayers and verses which are still printed (tho' in translation from the Latin now) in the official service books of the Church. And he's credited too with being one of the strong movers behind the effort to have the festival of Corpus Christi made a universal festival in the Latin Church — it did become such, and has remained so; and here in the UK we celebrated it yesterday. It's also remained, in many predominantly Catholic countries, ^{up till recent times} a very festive summertime festival, in rural areas especially: tho' perhaps it's not so prominent now as it was, say, a generation and more ago. | It's been remarked that Corpus Christi as a festival came into existence and flourished during a long period when people in fact did not so often actually receive the sacrament of the Eucharist. Now that they do more frequently do so, there is, naturally, a somewhat different emphasis in Corpus Christi. Just as there's been a whole new development in the way the Eucharist, as a sign and sacrament, is being understood and thought about these days. 'Corpus Christi', the Body of Christ. Christians do still differ about how they understand these words, and there's been a long and unfortunate disagreement about it. But there's also now a better mutual understanding of others' positions. So, what about us, personally, our own prayer, devotion and reflection on the mystery of Christ and His presence among us? The two particular points about Corpus

Christi, about the Eucharist or the presence of Christ, that I'd like to suggest for your prayer and reflection today are that it's a stans, and that it's a sign. Stans: this is surely the one obvious common point of understanding about the Lord's supper among all Christians, however else they may differ in interpretation. Stans with Christ, with God: and stans with one another. We come together to worship, to pray, to adore, to receive the Blessed Sacrament, because so long we feel we belong together in Christ — thro' Him, however imperfect our real union between each other in church or chapel on a Sunday morning or whenever. It's a community thing, however lacking in community we might be. And it's because we are, in one sense, the Body of Christ, the community of His followers, brothers and sisters. We may, perhaps, have over-emphasised in our own minds God's stans with us, as individuals: not thought enough, maybe, about how we stans with Christ His life, His suffering-death-resurrection, and what that means for the events and accidents, the routines and problems of day-by-day living. Then there's the equal stans among all of the gift that God gives us — stans with others, in such a way that the gift is not diminished, but the receivers multiplied. So, from the very first, the tradition of the Christian assembly has been to remember and to provide for the absent members: remembering in prayer, and sending to them the gift of God. And not only the absent, but especially the needy, people in material need in the first place, but also in any need. The word "stans" these days seems to have acquired a somewhat specialised use in some religious circles, as in "shared prayer", and speaking about one's own experiences of God. It's part of community building among people coming together in the name and the presence of the Lord. We also need to make more real and effective, tho', the more

'ordinary' meaning of that word, "to share", to give to those who haven't.

Reflect on this a moment now, listening to this music and joining in words of prayer together. **MUSIC - PRAYERS.**

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The second point I wanted to

suggest to you today about Corpus Christi is about the "sign", or symbol, or (if you like) the communication-critical-words that Corpus Christi is — whether you think of the sacrament, the assembly, the festival of that name, the church which also is the Body of Christ. ^{You may perhaps recall about 10 yrs ago mentioned last year} the fuss that was created in the U.S.

when the Navy were going to call a nuclear attack submarine after one of the country's cities (it is a normal enough practice). But when the city chosen was Corpus Christi, ⁱⁿ Texas, that gave a different, and in the eyes of ^{many people not least} the Catholic bishops of the U.S., a highly inappropriate connotation: ^{eventually there was} ~~more recently~~ there's been a compromise, and the ship's name ^{was to have been} will now be "The City of Corpus Christi". The point is, the name is a

sign — a sign of another reality, a pointer to or a reminder of God's own personal presence and action among people. Our slanting is a sign — to ourselves of why we're here and how much more still needs to be shared: to others who watch and notice — but what do they see? The Body of Christ in the world? "See how these Christians love" — that was an outsider's comment long ago: and today? The things we do, the signs of faith that we make are also always a challenge to us to be what we profess, and to do (in His name) what Christ calls us to do for others, for people in need, who are hungry, imprisoned, naked, sick, for the world of today.