

Lay Address, Sunday 11th June 2023.

May the Holy Spirit touch my lips, open our hearts, and shape our lives.

The opening words of today's reading from John's Gospel that we have heard this morning:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

This saying by Jesus is one of the key texts for the feast of Corpus Christi that we are celebrating today, and I will come back to it by a roundabout route, by way of our other celebration today – the baptism of four people here in St George's.

Zeethan, Shannon, Joshua and Jonathan, it is an honour for me to be here speaking to you and your families and godparents on the day of your baptism, speaking to you as a lay person welcoming you into our church. Of course, you or your family have been coming to this church for some time and I hope that you have felt welcome every time that you have been. So why do I say that I am welcoming you? Well, part of the point of baptism is that you or your parents and godparents are putting you forward publicly, making declarations of faith, and making a commitment to following Christ. And we are publicly declaring that we are taking you into the church and will work to maintain your faith and membership of the church community.

One could say that from now on there will be an added meaning to the welcome that you receive and how you feel on coming through the doors of this church and any other church that you enter in future.

I think this added meaning to the welcome is akin to what makes the Eucharist more than just a meal. This is what we are celebrating today in observing the Feast of Corpus Christi. We are celebrating Corpus Christi because, apart from Maundy Thursday, there is no other occasion in the year when we especially honour the eucharist. We are recognising the power of the shared meal of bread and wine to transform our lives. There is no need to worry about whether the bread and wine are changed in the service. What makes this meal special is that it was begun by Jesus himself while he was alive as we are. Its power is inseparable from its meaning for God's church. Just as when we get to the end of the romantic film, the actual touching of the lips by the lovers cannot be separated from what it means to them to kiss.

A way of understanding Baptism is to see it both as a welcome by God but also a welcoming to the newcomer by those already at the meal to join in the feast and come to the table. It is an invitation to share in the meaning of all the rituals that we as people, led by our priest, perform together, but supremely in the eucharist. In other words, you are today made welcome by this congregation acting on behalf of the whole church to make yourselves ready for the feast.