

This Sunday is the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, traditionally known as Corpus Christi; it was instituted by Pope Urban IV in 1264, so it's been around a long time.

It's sometimes hard for people to accept the doctrine of the Real Presence – the substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist – but this is often due to a misunderstanding the use of the terms 'flesh' and 'blood'. Many of Jesus' earliest followers misunderstood them, they took them literally, and the Gospel of John tells us that they said to one another: "This is intolerable language. Who can accept such a doctrine?"

If we meant actual, physical flesh and blood as we know it, it *would* be intolerable – but we don't. We don't mean biological flesh and blood, we mean *sacramental* Body and Blood – sacramental in the outward form of bread and wine. We mean that Jesus is so truly present, that bread has become the sacramental *form* of his flesh and wine has become the sacramental *form* of his blood.

Anything less than the real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist would not be enough: a sacramental 'symbol' would not be enough; bread and wine which were special but remained bread and wine would not be enough; a sign would not be enough; a representation would not be enough; a 'shared meal' would not be enough. All of these things put together would not be enough. If we did not possess the real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, God would be short-changing us – which is impossible.

Mass is never not being offered somewhere in the world, every hour of day and night. It is being *perpetually* offered. In the Eucharist, love of God enters the world through the sacramental presence of Christ. This continuous inpouring of the divine is like a drip-feed on a sick patient – which is what our world is. Its heart is being kept alive, kept beating – despite the very worst that human beings do to creation and to each other.

Which brings me to Julian of Norwich, the medieval English mystic, who would have been 22 years old when the pope instituted the feasts of Corpus Christi. In one of her revelations the Lord showed her the world in the palm of her hand. Julian writes:

“And in this he showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as a ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, ‘What may this be?’ And it was answered generally thus, ‘It is all that is made.’ I marvelled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothing for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it. And so have all things their beginning through the love of God. In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second that God loves it. And the third, that God keeps it.”

The love that keeps the world in being is the Eucharist.