

## **“Bowing” - Corpus Christi 2011**

Of all the events of the Papal Visit last September, perhaps the most moving, was the Saturday Prayer Vigil in Hyde Park. The evening involved speakers and performances, banners and candles, but its heart was this: a period of silent adoration before the Exposed Blessed Sacrament. Despite a congregation of tens of thousands, there was hardly a noise as we worshipped that bread which was no longer bread but our Lord. I was there doing media work and I had to step out during the Exposition. I left by a side entrance reserved for journalists and was wonderfully surprised by what was outside the high fencing: hundreds of people on their knees looking up at a large screen which was showing live shots of the Blessed Sacrament. We had all become like those shepherds at the manger, bending our knees to look at the Son of God.

At the end of July, I shall be in Lourdes with two hundred young people from our diocese. There they shall learn about Mary appearing to Bernadette and the waters in which people bathe. Many of them will know that Lourdes is a place of miracles but they probably won't know this: that most established healings in Lourdes have not happened at the Grotto but during the daily Blessed Sacrament Procession. It is in the presence of the Lord that the lame walk and the dumb speak.

Why do we believe that bread and wine become fully Jesus - body and blood, soul and divinity? Only because Jesus promised! 'For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.' As St Thomas Aquinas wrote for this Feast Day:

Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee deceived:  
How says trusty hearing? That shall be believed;  
What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do;  
Truth Himself speaks truly or there's nothing true.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of his Gospel, St Matthew tells us that when the disciples saw the Risen Lord for the last time, 'they fell down before him' (28:17). So we do nothing less. When we come before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, we genuflect. During Mass, at the words of consecration, we kneel. After the priest has consecrated the host and then the chalice, he genuflects both times. Again, before receiving Holy Communion, he genuflects. To fall down on our knees is the absolutely natural and right reaction to being in the presence of the living Son of God.

Those of us, who are older, will remember that until some decades ago, it was normal to receive Holy Communion kneeling at altar rails. Since then, we have simply queued for Holy Communion. It has been decided, however, that that is not a sufficient act of adoration before receiving the Body and Blood of Our Lord. So from the autumn, with the new translation of the missal, it will become the practice in our country to bow our head before receiving Holy

---

<sup>1</sup> *Adoro Te Devote* - translation by G. M. Hopkins

Communion. And it seems to me, that to give us time to get used to this, we should start this small, individual act of adoration from today, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, when we celebrate the irreplaceable gift of the Blessed Sacrament.

From now on then, we shall do this: when I turn to Roger and the altar servers, they will bow their head before I say 'The Body of Christ.' They will also bow their head before a minister says 'The Blood of Christ.' For the rest of us, who are coming down the aisle, we shall bow our head as the person before us is receiving the Host and then, if we are receiving from the chalice, we shall bow our head again, as the person before us receives. In some parishes of our diocese, they have already introduced the practice and, as I said, it will become national from the autumn. Before I was ordained a deacon, rather than bowing my head, I used to genuflect as the person before me received Holy Communion. Should you wish to do this, you may. It is quite a common practice among young Catholics in certain communities and countries.

It will take some time for bowing our head to become a habit. For some months, perhaps, we will feel self-conscious. So what! At Mass, the Son of God Himself comes to us, in the form of bread and wine. From today, we shall do a little bit more to acknowledge this great truth and to give God what He deserves: our adoration.