



## The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

### Homily for Corpus Christi (4<sup>th</sup> June) 2026

On the Feast of Corpus Christi, when we celebrate God's gift of the Eucharist to the Church, we might note that the identification of the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine with the Body and Blood of Christ is found in Saint Paul's former epistle to the Church in Corinth. In other words, this conviction emerges from the earliest stratum of written Christian reflexion - and, within a decade or two of the Resurrection. It is, therefore, interwoven into the fabric of Christian doctrine and self-understanding.

The Greek word, which Saint Paul uses -  $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$  - connotes not just, as it were, flesh and bones, but the living reality of which the corporeal phenomenon is a sign of the deeper reality. So just as *our* physical bodies house a much more complex entity, which we might term personhood, so also, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements is more than mere flesh and blood.

In identifying the Eucharistic elements with the Body and Blood of Christ, we are not talking about creating, so to speak, some relic of the incarnate Christ, but something much more profound: a discernible encounter with the living Presence of the risen Christ.

This is important, of course, in many ways; but one of them crops up in later in the epistle: indeed, in the thread of the same theological contemplation. Here, Saint Paul states that we, the Church, are the Body of Christ; and he uses the same word -  $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ .

This shared terminology is no piece of semantic serendipity: there is an intrinsic connexion - indeed, shared identity between the Sacrament and the Church: both are manifestations of the Presence of the risen Christ in the world. That raises the prospect that, for Saint Paul, what we believe of the Eucharistic elements is true also of the Church.

To a point, there is a distinction between these two modes of that Presence: whilst His Sacramental Presence is pure, His Presence in the Church is adulterated by the frailty inherent in the human character. At the same time, we need to be careful not to make too much of this, but remember that, in principle the Church manifests the Presence of Christ.

Saint Paul, of course, is not alone in making this point. In the Epistles general of Saint Peter, we are told that the Church is the Royal and holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ; that priesthood is Christ's and so, it is as the Body of Christ that we offer the sacrifices of Christian discipleship. Thus understood, the Sacramental Presence of Christ manifests the Presence, which, albeit in clouded way, inheres in the Church, which celebrates the Sacraments.

This truth challenges us to reflect on the way that we view the Church. It is a complex matter, because, as I have observed, Christ's Presence is interwoven with the institutional foibles of its earthly facet - what we sometimes call the *Church Militant*. The vagaries of ecclesiastical life can make it very difficult to maintain a reverence for the Church.

Equally, and very importantly, as well as surveying the folly of others, we need to look at ourselves and evaluate our own participation in the life of the Church, asking ourselves about the extent to which we are appropriate vessels of the Presence of the risen Christ.

As a last thought, I wonder how we would all respond if, looking at the monstrance, we saw not a consecrated Host, but the image of members of the congregation.