

**“Renewed and nourished by the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of your Son,
we ask of your mercy, O Lord, that what we celebrate with constant devotion may be
our sure pledge of redemption.”**

Prayer after Communion

With the feast of Corpus Christi, and our First Communion Sunday last week, still fresh in our minds we have, today, the first in a series of occasional sermons on the Blessed Sacrament as part of our preparation for our local Eucharistic Congress in September. Over the next couple of months we shall pause and reflect on what the Blessed Sacrament is, and what receiving Holy Communion devoutly can do for us.

The words of the Prayer after Communion, which we have just heard and will hear again at the end of Mass, remind us that what we receive each time we go to Holy Communion is sacred and precious. Yet in a world where the only thing that is treated as sacred is the environment, and the only things that are held to be precious are the opinions of modern-day ideologies, we might be forgiven for losing sight of what we mean by the word sacred.

The word *sacred* comes from the Latin meaning to make holy, to consecrate, to dedicate, to set apart, but it also carries the meaning of being set free from a curse.

To begin with, we know that only God is holy. God bears an absolute moral purity and an infinite transcendence. God is completely free from any form of stain or error. The purity of God is so perfect that we cannot imagine what that looks like because we have never encountered anything that is utterly and perfectly pure. But it also means that God is completely transcendent: He is beyond us, above us, utterly unreachable, and His nature – His being – is wholly unfathomable to mere creatures like you and me. He is perfect in His

goodness, in His truth, in His beauty, and in His majesty and glory. Finite creatures cannot even begin to imagine what God is like.

Next, it is important to remember that when Adam committed the original sin in the Garden of Eden, mankind fell from grace and from friendship with God, and became overshadowed by the same curse which was heaped upon the devil because of his lies and deceits, and his utter opposition to the goodness, the truth, and the beauty of God: ‘Because thou hast done this thing, thou art cursed among all cattle, and beasts of the earth: upon thy breast shalt thou go, and earth shalt thou eat all the days of thy life’ (Gen 3:14). In other words, far from participating in the purity and beauty of life in heaven, the devil – and because of our sins, we also – are bound to the limitations of life on earth.

And this is the point of our holy religion. The Son of God came down to earth so that the transcendent God could be near us – Emmanuel: God-with-us – to forgive us our sins, to cleanse our souls, and to raise us up once more to a share in the goodness and beauty of life with God that we, as a race, had forfeited in the Garden of Eden. In other words, the Son of God came down to save us from living under the shadow of the curse and to raise us up, to set us apart from the things of earth, and to lift us up to a participation in the life of God instead. As St Paul tells us elsewhere, we are cursed for not abiding by the law of God, but Christ has redeemed us from the curse by being made, Himself, a curse on our behalf by being hanged on a tree (Gal 3:10-13).

When something is made sacred, then, it means that it has been freed from a curse, cleansed from impurity, and raised up and set apart from the things of this world in order for it to participate in the holiness of God.

Many things may be made sacred: altars and tabernacles, statues and churches, and of course our souls when they have sanctifying grace poured into them through the Sacraments. But above all the things on earth that are made sacred, the Blessed Sacrament

stands out as unique. Ordinary bread and wine is taken by the priest and is consecrated at Mass not just to be blessed – rosaries, and pictures, and houses, and even cars may be blessed – not just to be blessed but to be sanctified, made holy, raised up and set apart in a unique fashion. At the consecration of the Mass, the priest’s actions and words change the bread and wine into something completely different: into the Body and Blood, the soul and the very divinity – the Godhead – of Christ Himself. We call this change the miracle of *transubstantiation* because although what we see continues to look and taste like bread and wine, in fact the substance – the bread-ness and the wine-ness – has been transformed into something completely different. They are no longer bread and wine at all, and we must not call them bread and wine. Instead, they have become the Sacred Body and the Precious Blood of the Son of God Himself, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

So sacred – so holy – is the Blessed Sacrament that there is nothing on earth that compares with It. Nothing else even comes close to being like It. And that’s because the Blessed Sacrament isn’t a ‘thing,’ it doesn’t symbolize or represent Christ. The Blessed Sacrament is a Person: it is Our Lord Himself.