



## **8.30am Holy Communion, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent 2021**

This Lent we have stumbled onto something of a focus on prayer. Last week at this Eucharist Fr Stephen mentioned that the Feeding of the 5,000 is of course St John's way (along with the wedding at Cana) of unfolding the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. St John uses these events and their astounding imagery to illuminate the service well known to His and our and every Church community as the centre of Christian life – The Eucharist.

And so, in the light of today's first reading, we draw our attention to prayer again. This time to the highest form of prayer known to Christians: The Eucharist, Mass, Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is written, of course, by the Early Church to the Hebrews, the Jews, not gentile Christians. Because of this it is an enormous gift to us. It digs deeply into the treasures of the story of God's ancient people, of their faith and life and shows Christ standing there – the inheritor and fulfillment of all that ancient promise. It has all been leading to Jesus. As He tells us in today's Gospel 'before Abraham was, I was' and

‘Abraham rejoiced’ to see the coming of Christ in whom all the promises of old met their fulfilment.

In today’s first reading He is described as the ‘High Priest’. Who would normally enter the temple inner courts to sacrifice incense, and goats and calves and turtle doves and rest; just as the Jews had always done for the propitiation of sin. Sacrifice for sin is a near universal human impulse. Muslims still do it, the only reason Jews don’t still do it is because the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD. The Jewish people are waiting to rebuild the temple (and presumably resume the sacrifices), in the meantime having no holy place for sacrifice Judaism has evolved and become a religion of the word and the synagogue, as we know it today. But sacrifice remains essential to humanity and God. But this is the *Old* Covenant. The Epistle to the Hebrews makes it quite clear: Jesus is the mediator and minister of the New Testament, the new covenant. In *His* blood, *not* that of goats and calves. No poor dumb animal, but His own self (as divine and sinless and beautiful and good as He was) given as a final reconciliation - unrepeatable, unundoable, *once* and for *all*, in all places and ages (past, present and to come), a ‘promise of eternal inheritance’ as today’s first reading says.

And that is why you haven't come here today with a heifer pulled along on a string, and Fr Stephen isn't sharpening his knife, and I'm not sprinkling you now in its blood. Because it has been done. The perfect and final sacrifice. The sacrifice so complete and perfect that it has undone the whole economy of sacrifice, no more is needed or valid or possible. 'It is finished', as we will hear on Good Friday.

And it is *here*, in His Body broken for us, in His blood poured out for us. We stand at the altar and beneath the cross and the banquet of heaven all at once when we stand here.

'Do this in Remembrance of me' is our invitation from Christ Himself given on that night of His Passion, a night we will soon participate in again. This gift from Christ is the closest we can come to God on this side of death. It is His gift to His people to be with Him, to grow in Him, to be becoming one with Him until He comes again. That's why it is the highest form of prayer, and the source and summit of our earthly lives, the engine room of hope, healing waters to drink deeply, angels' food, the source and summit of our faith, God with us. All these things and *more*, hidden in the humblest of gifts – little bits of bread and a splash of wine. Draw near with faith and receive this Holy Sacrament to your comfort.