



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

Office for Ethnic Chaplaincies and Eastern Catholic Churches
Co-ordinator: Monsignor Daniel McHugh

*“The Priesthood is the Love
of the Heart of Jesus”
– St John Vianney –*

*Reflection for the Solemnities of Corpus Christi and the Sacred Heart
7 and 12 June 2026*

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.” (John 6:51)

As I write this Reflection for the coming week where we have the celebration of two Solemnities: Corpus Christi (the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ) Sunday 7 June and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Friday 12 June, I am conscious of how closely linked these two are, and how much they are at the centre of our journey in Faith. Originally Corpus Christi was celebrated on



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the Thursday following Trinity Sunday: an article in the regular online Newsletter *Aleteia* (Philip Kosloski) reminds us that it was in the 13th Century that a Belgium nun Juliana of Liege urged Church leaders to institute a feast in honour of the Most Blessed Sacrament on that day. Many will recall that it remained there until relatively recently; it is now celebrated on the Sunday following. The Feast of Corpus Christi was established in 1264 and was given an Octave soon afterwards, meaning that the spiritual themes celebrated on Corpus Christi remained the primary focus of Church Liturgy for eight days. Then in the 17th Century St Margaret Mary Alacoque (of Paray-le-Monial) had a vision in which Jesus revealed his heart to her and said, “I ask thee that the First Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi be set apart as a special feast to honour my Heart.” It is recorded that she had this vision during Eucharistic Adoration, with the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. This was fulfilled in 1856 when Pope Pius IX established the Feast of the Sacred Heart following the Octave of Corpus Christi. The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart is celebrated on that day though the Octave of Corpus Christi is no longer celebrated and the Solemnity of Corpus Christi is transferred to the Sunday after Trinity Sunday. Kosloski in his article for *Aleteia* writes: the two devotions – to the Eucharist and to the Sacred Heart – are closely connected...”The Sacred Heart explains the mystery of the love of Jesus by which He becomes bread in order to nourish us with His substance, while in the Eucharist we have the real presence of this same Heart, living in our midst. It is wonderful to



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contemplate the Heart of Jesus as the symbol of His infinite love, but it is even more wonderful to find Him always near us in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Jesus himself asked St Margaret Mary to promote both the feast of the Sacred Heart and Eucharistic Adoration... It is in the Eucharistic host that we can find the Heart of Jesus, beating and pouring itself out upon us.” It was St John Henry Newman who said this prayer: “O most Sacred, most loving Heart of Jesus, Thou art concealed in the Holy Eucharist, and Thou beatest for us still... O my God, when Thou dost condescend to suffer me to receive Thee, to eat and drink Thee, and Thou for a while takest up Thy abode within me, O make my heart beat with Thy Heart.” (cf Meditations and Devotions) Newman had founded the Congregation of the Oratory at Old Oscott in the 1840s and gave the House the name Maryvale: there is a little chapel there housing an image of the Sacred Heart, the first place of public devotion to the Sacred Heart in England. A Novena of Masses begins there this Thursday and ends on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart itself (12 June 7pm).

One of the devotions associated with the Solemnity of Corpus Christi is the Procession honouring the Blessed Sacrament. Traditionally the Pope leads a Procession in Rome from St John Lateran (his Cathedral Church) to St Mary Major to mark the Solemnity. Last year he quoted St Augustine in his Homily: “Christ is truly *‘panis qui reficit, et non deficit; panis qui sumi*



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potest, consumi non potest - he is bread that restores and does not run short; bread that can be eaten but not exhausted”. Cindy Wooden of the Catholic News Service, Rome, records in OSV News: “In the Corpus Christi procession, the Pope said, all those involved give witness to how Jesus’ real presence in the Eucharist transforms them and leads them to become his body, united in the Church.” This year Pope Leo will be in Spain for an Apostolic Visit on the occasion of Corpus Christi. His plan is to lead a Procession of the Blessed Sacrament in Madrid on that day; a wonderful witness of the power of the Eucharist to transform the lives of all who are touched by His Real Presence.

At the same time the Bishops of the United States of America will welcome the relics of St Margaret Mary to the US as they consecrate the country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on 11 June marking 250 years of Independence. Such a public act will be an occasion for us all to reflect on this Devotion and its relevance in our lives. For priests in particular it is an opportunity to reflect once more on the letter of Pope Benedict XVI as he inaugurated a “Year for Priests” to begin on the 150th Anniversary of the Death of St John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, 4th August 1859. It was 19th June 2009, the Feast of the Sacred Heart which he highlighted as a traditional Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests. The Pope quoted a frequent saying of the Curé of Ars: “The Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.” What a wonderful vocation, one we priests can thank God for especially on the Solemnity of the



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Sacred Heart of Jesus. One of my favourite Gospel passages is the Road to Emmaus: it is an image of Jesus walking with his disciples and sharing the scriptures with them; they came to the recognition of his presence at the Breaking of Bread, the Holy Eucharist.

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