

## **Ave Verum Corpus Natum ex Maria Virgine**

On the front of your newsletter is a thirteenth century prayer written by Pope Innocent and set to music many times, most famously by Mozart and by Elgar: *Ave Verum Corpus natum ex Maria Virgine*: ‘Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary.’ For a long time it was said, or sung, at the elevation, the moment when, having uttered the words of consecration, the priest elevates the Sacred Host high as he offers It to God and at the same time shows It to the people for their adoration. ‘*Hail, true Body*’ they would acclaim.

*Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary,  
having truly suffered, sacrificed on the cross for mankind,  
from whose pierced side water and blood flowed:  
be for us a sweet foretaste in the trial of death!*

*O sweet Jesus, O holy Jesus, O Jesus, son of Mary, have mercy on me. Amen.*

‘*Hail!*’ The prayer is an act of adoration, an act of worship and of homage to the living God. When we gaze upon the Blessed Sacrament, our first response is always to bow down in adoration because we know ourselves to be in the presence of Our Lord Himself. This is not some mere symbol. From the moment of the consecration, when the miracle of transubstantiation changes the Bread and Wine to become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we have before our eyes the Person of Christ, the very same Son of God who walked the highways and byways of the Holy Land two thousand years ago.

‘*Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary.*’ The Sacred Host is become the very flesh and blood that was drawn from His Mother at the moment of His conception in her womb and throughout the nine months that she was with child. And just as her flesh fed, nourished, and gave life to the body of her Son, so now does His flesh in the Holy Eucharist feed, nourish, and give life to our souls in Holy Communion.

*‘Hail, true Body... having truly suffered.’* The flesh that we consume in Holy Communion is the same flesh that suffered through hunger and thirst during Our Lord’s forty-day fast in the desert; the same flesh that suffered when Our Lord was struck in the face by the servant of the high priest; the same flesh that suffered when Our Lord was scourged at the pillar and crowned with thorns. So it is that when we receive Holy Communion we unite our sufferings to the sufferings of our Saviour who has come to dwell in our hearts.

*‘Hail, true Body... sacrificed on the Cross for mankind.’* The Body that we see in the hands of the priest raised up in an act of adoration is the same Body that was raised up on the Cross on Calvary; the same Body that was nailed to the tree, that was jeered at and mocked and spat upon, and that died a miserable death, sacrificed that we might live.

*‘Hail, true Body... from whose pierced side water and blood flowed.’* The Body of Christ that we worship here at Mass is the very Person of Christ Himself from whom all the goodness of the Sacraments flow: all the sanctifying grace that is given to us in the waters of Baptism and in the purifying forgiveness of Confession. This Most Holy Eucharist *is* Christ Himself who came down to earth that we might be forgiven our sins and saved from the eternal consequences of our sins, everlasting death in hell.

*‘Hail, true Body... a sweet foretaste [of heaven] in the trial of death.’* Christ died on the Cross so that we might live. If we unite ourselves to His crucified Body on the Cross by receiving His forgiveness in the Sacrament of Confession and by receiving Him into our souls worthily and prayerfully in Holy Communion, we might then be united to Him in the moment of our death and come to be united with Him in life, *after* death, in that sweet and blessed country that we call home.

For two thousand years, the Church has surrounded this most sacred reality with prayers and gestures worthy of the personal presence of the Son of God. For two thousand years, the Church has wrapped around the Sacramental presence of Christ our Lord with Her liturgy and Her prayers. For two thousand years, the prayers and meditations of all the saints have drawn us more deeply into the

mystery of Christ's sacramental presence, to raise our minds to the truth about who it is that we worship each time the priest elevates the Sacred Host at Mass.

For two thousand years, faithful Catholics – in awe at the mystery held up before their eyes – have done homage on their knees, just as the shepherds and the Magi bowed down in adoration before the manger in that humble stable so long ago.

Today, on the feast of Corpus Christ – the feast of the Most Sacred Body of Christ – we, too, kneel in adoration and pay homage to the living God who comes down upon the altar for our sake, and with all those who have whispered this beautiful prayer before us, we pray:

*'O sweet Jesus, O holy Jesus, O Jesus, Son of Mary, have mercy on me. Amen.'*