

“They too are the body of Christ”

The English journalist Malcolm Muggeridge wrote a book called *Something beautiful for God*. It was an account of the work of Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity, particularly their ministry of caring for the poor in Calcutta.

Muggeridge observed that Mother Teresa and the Sisters began their day with prayer, attending an early morning Mass in their chapel. Then they would go out into the city streets, where they would find the sick and the dying. Some of these people had no homes. They would be suffering and even dying on the side of the road. The Sisters would do what they could to give them some comfort in their sufferings.

One morning, as they were preparing for their work, Mother Teresa spoke to the Sisters. She referred to the Mass they had been to earlier and the tasks that lay ahead of them. “This morning, Sisters, we were at Mass and we saw how reverently the priest held the body of Christ at the altar. Today in the streets we will meet the sick and dying. We must likewise hold them reverently, for they too are the body of Christ.”

The feast we observe today is called “The solemnity of the body and blood of Christ”. It was first celebrated in the Belgian city of Liège in 1247 as a way of showing reverence and love for Christ in the eucharist, in the sacrament of the altar. The focus on Christ in the eucharist continues in the prayers of this feast to our own time – for example, in the opening prayer of today’s Mass:

Lord Jesus Christ,
you gave us the eucharist
as the memorial of your suffering and death.
May our worship of this sacrament of your body and blood
help us to experience the salvation you won for us
and the peace of the kingdom
where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

As we celebrate this feast, it is indeed appropriate to pray for a deeper reverence and love for Christ in the sacrament of the eucharist. However, it is also appropriate to pray for a deeper reverence and love for Christ wherever we meet him, especially in the poor and in all those who are in need.

In the gospel according to St Matthew, Jesus identifies himself with people in need and tells us that he regards any kindness done to them as a kindness done to him. “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.” (Matthew 25:35-36)

May we grow in reverence and love for the body of Christ on the altar. May we also grow in reverence and love for the people we meet day by day – for they too are the body of Christ.