

**Devotional Address given by the Superior-General at Benediction at the
Glastonbury Pilgrimage 15th June 2013**

“Ecce Panis Angelorum – Behold the Bread of Angels” proclaims the Blessed Sacrament banner in one of the churches I serve as parish priest in the East Midlands. It is the teaching which the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament wished to establish and promote within the life of the Anglican Church when it was founded just over 150 years ago. Its founders felt the need to teach the faith of the Real Presence in the Eucharist so that the lives of Christians in as many parishes as possible might be consecrated to Him who feeds us with Himself – the Lamb whom angels and archangels and the whole company of the Redeemed in heaven continue to adore. In this way the mission of the Church in a sometimes very hostile and dark world would be set forth and its members strengthened and encouraged for this work.

In many ways the work and mission of the CBS has been successful. The Eucharist is firmly established as the central act of worship in many parishes; there are more frequent communions; and the Blessed Sacrament is very often reserved not only for the communion of the sick and housebound but as a focus for prayer and devotion. For this we must praise God and rejoice – for in this Blessed Sacrament He feeds and sustains so many and the Lord’s command to do this in memory of Him is faithfully fulfilled. Where the light burns and the tabernacle or aumbry is veiled, there we know that God dwells with His people and that He has indeed made His home amongst them. *“Ecce Panis Angelorum – Behold the Bread of Angels.”* We join our voices with those of the disciples and of the crowds the Lord Jesus taught as we say in response *“Lord, give us this bread always.”*

The Gospels provide a backdrop to our devotion as we gaze on Jesus, the Bread of Angels now. Jesus promises to feed us with this food so that, unlike our forefathers in their wanderings in the desert, we will never go hungry. Surely this is a food which all would want and for which many would hunger? But we read in the Gospel that, after Jesus’ teaching about the Bread of Life, many fell away from him because it was too much for them or they did not understand. And the disciples themselves failed fully to comprehend that, in order to save them from their sins and

afford them forgiveness and salvation, the Son of Man must suffer in his body. "The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51). Here, then, we see set forth again the truth which Jesus himself taught the crowds: the Son of Man must suffer in his body. "This is my body," said Jesus as He shared his bread with His disciples on the night of his betrayal, putting himself into their hands for His memorial. So St Paul reminded the early Church: as often as we do this we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

"Ecce Panis Angelorum – Behold the Bread of Angels." "Behold the Lamb of God – Ecce Agnus Dei" we say as the Lord calls us forward to receive this Bread. "Behold the man – Ecce homo" said the Governor Pilate as he paraded Jesus to the crowds robed in the mockery of a purple cloak. All these scriptural resonances are with us today as we gaze on the Bread of Angels.

- The bread which feeds always in desert places – a sufficient manna from heaven.
- The bread which is the memorial that the Lord Jesus suffered in His body on the cross to give us and so offer us the hope of heaven.
- The man who is truly our king but whom crowds mocked before the Roman Governor.

"Behold" is the word for today's pilgrimage here in this holy place of Glastonbury. At the foot of the cross we have that word to Mary, the Lord's mother, as we do also to John, the beloved disciple, who was to take the blessed Mother into his home and into his heart.

"Ecce Panis Angelorum – Behold the Bread of Angels" – words which come from the Corpus Christi Sequence of St Thomas Aquinas, "Laud, O Sion, thy salvation"

Lo! the Angels' Food is given
To the pilgrims who hath striven;
See the children's Bread from heaven,
Which to dogs may not be cast;

Truth the ancient types fulfilling,
Isaac bound, a victim willing,

Paschal Lamb, its life-blood spilling,
Manna sent in ages past.

But however successful our forefathers have been in establishing and promoting devotion to Jesus in His Blessed Sacrament, we must be careful that, as with all God's gifts and all his graces, we do not take them for granted and forget the price or the cost. Herein lies the Body of the Lord – a costly sacrifice he willingly offered, a price paid so that we might have an entry to that banquet of life He has set for us, "Love the victim, love the feast" as the hymn tells us. With Simon Peter we say, "Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." We are numbered with those who have not drawn back: we believe and we have come to know that this is the Holy One of God.

O true Bread, good Shepherd, tend us,
Jesu, of thy love befriend us,
Thou refresh us, thou defend us,
Thine eternal goodness send us
In the land of life to see;
Thou who all things canst and knowest,
Who in earth such Food bestowest,
Grant us with thy saints, though lowest,
Where the heavenly Feast thou showest,
Fellow-heirs and guests to be.

Blessed, praised and hallowed be Jesus Christ on His throne of glory, and in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar!