

said nothing to undermine the practice. So why has it substantially died out? Possible explanations include the decline in the number of practising Catholics, the decline in the number of priests – when I was a child our church had a parish priest and two curates. There is also the fact that we perhaps we are all too busy to consider attending church twice on a Sunday, when shops are nowadays open for most of the day and numerous sporting activities take place. In addition some people have speculated that Benediction is “too Catholic” when over the last 50 years there has been more emphasis on ecumenism. Benediction, with its veneration of the transubstantiated host is unacceptable to non-Catholic Christians, apart from very high Anglicans. Nevertheless, in an article in the Catholic Herald in October 2022, Joanna Bogle wrote: “..young people flock in increasing numbers to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction – its revival a notable fact of Catholic life.” It is possible that this is more a Londoncentric viewpoint, since Benediction is frequently celebrated in central London, for example at Westminster Cathedral and the Brompton Oratory.

Next week: Whatever Happened to Indulgences?

-Stephen S.

Entrance antiphon: Proclaim a joyful sound and let it be heard; proclaim to the sends of the earth: The Lord has freed his people, alleluia.

First Reading: Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17

Psalms 65: Response: Cry out with joy to God all the earth.

Second Reading: 1Peter 3: 15-18

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Jesus said: If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him.’ Alleluia!

Gospel: John 14: 15-21

Memorial Acclamation: We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.

Communion Antiphon: If you love me, keep my commandments, says the Lord, and I will ask the Father and he will send you another Paraclete, to abide with you for ever, alleluia.



Sixth Sunday of Easter Cycle A, 2023 Weekly

Reflection: Whatever Happened to? (1) Benediction:

This is a short series dealing with matters which were once central to Catholic life,

practice and doctrine but have now become rare or substantially changed. The first is Benediction. Benediction is the service during which the Real Presence of Christ, exposed in a monstrance, is adored on the altar and then used to bless the worshippers. This service can still be found here and there, but long gone are the days when Catholic churches would have Benediction every Sunday afternoon/evening. When I was at primary school in the 1960s, the whole school would attend Benediction on a Thursday afternoon.

Benediction has a long history dating back to the 13th century after the feast of Corpus Christi was initiated in 1246. In the processions on this feast day the Blessed Sacrament would be carried in a type of monstrance for viewing and adoration by the faithful. Over time it became customary, particularly in Germany, to keep the Blessed Sacrament exposed at all times in churches. Also in the 13th century confraternities adopted the ritual of singing evening canticles before a statue of Our Lady and the practice of a popular evening service of devotion to Mary spread throughout Europe. The service often included the Salve Regina, which dates from the 11th century. Over the following two to three centuries the Marian service began to be afforded greater solemnity by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Gradually the two separate traditions came together and fused into one, with the service ending in Benediction, namely the priest making the sign of the cross over the congregation with the monstrance. The two hymns composed by St Thomas Aquinas for the feast of Corpus Christi, O Salutaris Hostia and Tantum Ergo, became an integral part of the service, as did the recitation of the Divine Praises after the Host was returned to the tabernacle.

Benediction remained a widespread and regular act of worship until about the time of the Second Vatican Council. As far as I am aware, that Council