

### **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary time**

One of the great tragedies of the Covid Pandemic has been the way that people have died. Most of them have died without their family members being at their side. And families have often been deprived of the opportunity to mourn their loved ones with adequate funeral celebrations. We cannot live well without mourning those who have died.

It was important for Jesus that he mourned those who were close to him. Our gospel today begins with the news that John the Baptist had been murdered by Herod. Jesus goes off to a quiet place to mourn the death of his cousin.

But he is not given very much time alone before people come to be healed by him. Jesus puts aside his own pain to attend to the pain and suffering of the crowd who are drawn to him. He offers them compassion and healing. As the day draws to its close the disciples urge Jesus to send the people away so that they can go and buy something for themselves to eat. They describe where they are as being a lonely place.

That talk of being in a deserted place brings to mind the story of the Israelites wandering through the desert after their freedom from slavery. God cared for them in the desert. He satisfied their hunger and fed them with bread

and quails. Jesus will not send the people away hungry now. Rather than the people go and buy something, he tells his disciples to give them something to eat themselves. This must have sounded ridiculous. They hardly had enough food to feed themselves. Five loaves and two fish were almost nothing if they were to share it with others. Jesus asks them to give what they have to him. Jesus calls us to do that every day. He asks us to give him what we have. So much of the time we think that we have nothing to offer him. And yet the little we seem to be able to offer to the Lord is more than enough for him to use in the service of others.

What happens next is described in terms of what we do each time we gather here to celebrate Eucharist. Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and shares it with us. Matthew wants us to realise that it is the same Jesus who fed the 5000 who nourishes our hunger when he gathers us here for Eucharist.

That everybody there was fed and had more than enough is a miracle in more than one way. Jesus demanded a great amount of trust, from his disciples first, who had to give away the little they had, so that others could be fed. But Jesus trusted that their sharing would go on right to the very last person. He needed everyone there to act as part of a community, as part of a family that cared about each other.

Jesus asks that of us each time we gather for Eucharist. For the miracle of the Eucharist to work we need to see ourselves as the community that the Lord loves and gathers to feed in our hunger. We need to trust that the Lord feeds us through each other. We learn from one another how to put into practice the gospel that is proclaimed to us. Our faith is nourished by coming to know each other. When we come to know something of the story of how God is at work in the life of the person who prays beside us, then we can recognise more easily how God is at work in our life too.

This does not happen easily in today's world. We lead busy lives and we are not encouraged to waste time listening to people that we do not know. But isn't that why our churches have foyers and parishes have halls? Isn't that why we are invited to come early to Mass to meet the people we are going to pray for? Isn't that why we are invited to stay a while after Mass and have a cuppa with the members of our family that we have not yet met?

Can you imagine how embarrassing it is going to be in heaven when we meet the people that we have prayed with here on earth but cannot call them by name? To be fair we can only get to know people one at a time. But it is good to remember that the community that Jesus calls

us to be part of now is but a foretaste and a sign of what God has in mind for the future, for us and for the whole of humanity. It is a foretaste of the banquet that Jesus has prepared for all of us in heaven. Only then will our hunger be fully satisfied. Only then will we know how much we needed one another here on earth. Only then will we fully understand how our Church is called to be a sign of what God's kingdom will be like when all of mankind will be a community that cares for one another.

Meanwhile we can catch some of Paul's excitement as he describes God's love for us today. He lists seven hardships and trials which cannot cut us off from God's love. He then lists seven hostile powers that are powerless against the love God has for each of us. The truth of what Paul says is waiting to be discovered in the lives of those around us. We celebrate God's love for us each time we gather to be fed again by Jesus. Jesus feeds us here so that we can be his Church for others. He keeps saying to us, "Give them something to eat yourselves." The Lord who feeds us in the Eucharist feeds others through us.