

Body & Blood of Christ

On Friday night I took part in a family celebration to mark the 80th. birthday of my sister's husband Barry. It was an opportunity to spend time with nephews and nieces that I do not see very often. I had a real sense of being connected with them all. I suppose that is what family celebrations allow us to do.

Today we have gathered for another family celebration. Jesus has invited us to share the Eucharist together on a day when we remember what a great gift the Eucharist is for us. But what sort of a sense do we have of being connected with the other members of our family who have gathered with us for this Eucharist? If we are new to this community, do we feel that we have been welcomed here?

Luke makes the point in today's gospel that Jesus thought it was pretty important for people to feel welcome when they gather with him. "Jesus made the crowds welcome and talked to them about the kingdom of God; and he cured those who were in the need of healing". Today's gospel follows on from the first missionary experience of his twelve closest disciples. They were sent out by Jesus to preach and to heal in his name. They came back excited by what they found themselves able to do. But they were exhausted and Jesus took them to rest at a place where they could be by

themselves. But the crowds found them, and Jesus did not turn them away. Near the end of the day the Twelve wanted to do just that. They wanted to send them away so that they didn't have to bother about them anymore.

But Jesus had different ideas and he asks the twelve to give them something to eat themselves. Fr. Michael Trainor helped us to understand a little more about this gospel. The crowd was enormous. Luke tells us that there were five thousand men there. Those five thousand men represented family groups of up to fifty. There were a quarter of a million mouths to be fed. It would have cost a fortune to buy enough food to feed all these people. How could they feed such a group with just five loaves and two fish? But Jesus signalled to the twelve that he could feed them. He called the twelve to get them to sit in their family groups of about fifty. It was only when they became communities connected with each other that Jesus could feed them. And so it is with us.

As we listen to what happened next we cannot help but think about what happens when we gather for Eucharist. Jesus took the bread and the fish. He blessed and broke it and handed it to his disciples to distribute it among the crowd. In the Eucharist Jesus prays a blessing over the bread for us; he breaks it and shares it with us. It is no longer just bread, that is given, but the Lord himself.

Today we read the oldest account in the Scriptures of what happened at the Last Supper from what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Community. Paul helps us to remember the sacrificial aspect of Jesus self-offering as well as the communion with Christ and each other that the supper is meant to express and to nourish. We hear Jesus say, “do this as a memorial of me.” We know that Jesus was not just calling the Church to say the same words that he said over the bread and the wine, but to remember that this was Jesus pouring out his life for us. He offers the Eucharist to us so that we can remember and imitate his life giving death. Jesus gives us the Eucharist as the memorial of his final act of love for us. This is what we have to remember. His love is what we have to make present again in our world today.

When we receive the Lord we speak of it as Holy Communion. We are united with Jesus and with all who sit at table with us. We will continue to learn what it means to be united with Jesus as we grow as people of faith who know and love Jesus. The closer we get to the heart of Jesus, the more clearly we will understand what we are called to do as his disciples. At Mass on Thursday morning some of the youngest of the children who made their First Holy Communion two weeks ago very beautifully received the Lord again. Those children are only beginning to understand what Holy

Communion means for them. Our hope is that they are at the beginning of a lifelong and ever deepening relationship with the Lord who longs to come to them in Holy Communion.

Children can often teach us what it means to be in Holy Communion with other people. Children haven't learnt to be so selective about who they love. As adults we can be very narrow minded about who the Lord has called us to be in communion with. We can be like the disciples in today's gospel who would rather send people away than feed them. Jesus called the twelve to share what they had with everyone who was there on that day. An impossible task of course, until they had put what they had into the hands of the Lord.

Jesus calls every one of us to share what we have been given. It is up to us to put all that we have into the hands of the Lord too. Then we can hear the last words of the Eucharist in a new way. We can hear the Lord sending us home with words like, “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life”. We accept that commission knowing that we will give glory to God when we place our lives into the hands of the one who feeds us here and makes us one with Him.