

Body and Blood of Christ

I am sometimes asked who cooks the meals at home for Fr. John and myself. Well, it is nearly always me, but I don't mind that. I enjoy cooking and I have learnt to be able to look ahead so that I don't often get caught out in the preparation of the evening meal.

Jesus did not want to be caught out as he prepared his final meal with his disciples. Mark spends a long time telling us about the preparation that was made for the Lord's Passover Meal. But that preparation was not just to get it all right on the night. It was rather to point again to who the host of that meal really was. Everything happened just as Jesus the prophet said it would.

The preparation that preceded the First Eucharist can help us to reflect upon how well we prepare for our celebrations of the Sunday Eucharist. Do we prepare for the Eucharist by remembering the people who need our prayers? Do we open up the Parish bulletin that is emailed to us and read ahead the Scriptures that will be proclaimed? Do we ask the Lord to help us to hear what he wants us to hear as they are proclaimed?

Today's gospel then takes us to the heart of what happened when Jesus celebrated his last supper. Jesus took the bread of the Passover Meal, blessed it and broke it and gave it to his disciples. "Take it, this is my body."

This bread was no longer ordinary bread but the Lord himself. The Eucharistic bread broken and offered to his disciples foreshadowed the body that would soon be broken on the cross. "Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them. This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many." The wine had become the blood that would soon be poured out on the cross to seal the covenant of love between God and his people. As Mark describes what happens here, he forces us to think about how the Eucharist makes present the self-giving love of Jesus made clear for us by the way that he died for us.

Much is made of blood, the symbol of life. That was why blood was used in the communion sacrifices of the Old Testament. We have a description of one of those communion sacrifices in today's reading from the Book of Exodus. We are told that 'half of the blood Moses took up and put into basins, the other half he cast on the altar.' The altar represented God living in their midst. "And taking the Book of the Covenant he read it to the listening people, and they said, 'We will observe all that the Lord has decreed; we will obey.' Then Moses took the blood and cast it toward the people." It was a very dramatic way of sealing the covenant between God and his people. It was a very powerful way of saying that they were ready to live in communion with the God who had chosen them to be his own.

One of the things that we have been asked to forego since the onset of Covid 19 has been the wonderful privilege of drinking the precious blood of the Lord from the one Eucharistic Cup. This had been a way for us to experience more fully our Communion with the one who is the source of life. Perhaps we are more conscious now of how the large Eucharistic host is broken into smaller pieces so that many of us can share in the one bread that is Christ's Body. We are all made one in Christ as we are fed by the Lord.

When I was speaking to the young people who will be Confirmed and receive Jesus for the first time next weekend, I told them that it will take a very long time for them to really understand what it means to receive the Eucharist. To know that what we are receiving is not just ordinary bread, but Jesus himself, is only the beginning of what we need to know. It takes a long time to know who Jesus is. It takes an even longer time to understand what it means to live in communion with Jesus each day of our lives.

While we are reading Mark's Gospel this year, we are often reminded of how hard it was for that first group of disciples to understand who Jesus was. We read about their lack of understanding of the mission of Jesus and their call to be like him in every way. I think this gives

us hope as we struggle to understand Jesus and to be committed to share in his ministry.

Each time we come to celebrate Eucharist we have to admit that we struggle to be faithful disciples of the Lord and that we often fail. We begin each Eucharist by admitting that we are sinners and ask the Lord to have mercy on us. Before we receive Holy Communion we admit of our unworthiness again and ask the Lord to say but the word so that we could be healed.

But when we have received the Lord in this wonderful sacrament, we hear the Lord sending us out to make him present in our world. With all our weakness the Lord still uses us to bring his life and love to those who need him. However well we have prepared ourselves to come to this celebration, the Lord prepares us again to go from here as people who have been renewed by the food and drink that gives us strength. Renewed by the one who poured out his life for us we are sent to bring life to others.