

HOMILY CORPUS CHRISTI SUNDAY 6TH JUNE 2021

JESUS AS SUSTAINING BREAD OF LIFE FOR ALL

Mk 14.12-26

Ex 24.3-8

Heb 9.11-15

Welcome to sunny, occasionally wet, winter so far, as the leaves continue to fall! Here we are again, for virtual Eucharist this week, ironically now on the Feast of Corpus Christi, where we can't physically be present to celebrate and receive Eucharist.

It's also the weekend for the St Vincent de Paul Winter Appeal, to assist those in need in our local community, through supporting the great work done by our members of the St Therese's Conference. Parishioner and member John O'Connor speaks on-line, of the work and the needs being addressed alongside this virtual Mass today, so I recommend that you tune in to hear his message, and make a donation if you can.

I give a further reminder of our moral obligation to get vaccinated as soon as we get the opportunity, as a matter of the common good and public health and safety, so get in line when you can, if you haven't done so already. As I said earlier, I've had my first jab, and await the second, as the COVID variants lurk in the background. Meanwhile, patience and perseverance are needed as the demands of work and study from home continue for the hopefully brief time being! At least we can get out for a walk in the autumn, now winter, sunshine!

Having started at the seminary in 1971, named Corpus Christi College in Werribee now 50 years ago, with 26 others, including our good friend Bill Attard, my predecessor here at St Therese's, today's feast always takes me back to that time, when we had one of our early escapes for an evening out at St Francis' in the city, to celebrate with the Blessed Sacrament community there, as it was their feast day and the focus of their religious devotion. They even had exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with the Monstrance above the altar during every Mass. In time, with Vatican II reforms of liturgical practices and deeper theological insights, it was realized that it was more appropriate to separate Eucharistic adoration from the celebration of Eucharist itself. This was largely due to the realization that active participation of the faithful present was a necessity, and that private devotion had its place, but outside Mass.

At the same time, after 2 years of seminary life at Werribee, the new Corpus Christi opened at Clayton, where there was a more open system, entailing more personal responsibility and practical pastoral involvement in parish life, along with the normal spiritual and personal development, along with scriptural, theological and other necessary academic input. The opportunity was also provided for studies at Monash University (where I continued a science degree), to engage students with the broader academic world as well. To my mind, it was a far more realistic means of preparation for priesthood and pastoral ministry in our world today, and I am very thankful for that, in my life and ministry.

Meanwhile, our Catholic focus has always been on Eucharist, as *the source and summit of the Christian life and the centre of Christian community*, was defined in the first major document of Vatican II in 1963, when I was in Grade 6, aged 10. I do clearly remember the changes coming, with Mass moving from Latin, with no responses from the congregation to dialogue Mass, with responses in Latin, to being fully in English, and there was a certain excitement about being able to participate more fully. Then Saturday evening Mass came in as a welcome innovation.

When we look back, those of us old enough to remember, always felt that the Catholic thing about Mass on Sunday was about community and belonging, as well as worship and spiritual sustenance. It was just assumed that Sunday Mass was part of the deal, and the benefits were many in terms of identity and common faith, and getting grace. Readings from Scripture were included but not emphasized, and the message of Jesus was always presented in the Gospel. So, at the heart of it all, the Good News of Jesus was always there, and the call to discipleship for all to respond to. Even the misnomer of the word *Mass*, really, came from the reminder at the end, *Ite Missa est (Go, you are sent)*, that we were sent on a mission to live as faithful followers of Jesus in word and deed.

Yet, there was a distorted emphasis on Communion being only for those who were worthy, and who might that have been anyway? Is not our prayer before receiving Eucharist "*Lord, I am not worthy...*"? Which is

a far more accurate statement of our human reality. Frank Moloney SDB has a book on Eucharist titled *Bread for the Broken*, wherein he reflects on it not being for the pure and the perfect, because no-one is, and the self-righteous who think they might be, in reality, being far from it, demonstrated in their flawed superior and judgmental attitudes. Jesus was never obsessed with perfection, (apart from his admonition: ***“Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”!!***). We surely know that we can’t take such words too literally. He sets ideals, but none of us can possibly live up to them. Still, we keep trying!

When we look at the life of Jesus, in word and action, we see his public ministry constantly involved in reaching out and welcoming those on the fringes, those ostracised by the religious leaders, those blamed for their afflictions, physical or mental. He brought women, particularly those in trouble, and children, into his close but open circle, so that they could experience his personal presence, compassion, healing and forgiveness.

Table fellowship with all and sundry, especially what might be called the *riff-raff* of the society of his times, characterized Jesus as friend of tax collectors and sinners, as with shorty Zaccheus up the tree, but with all, really, remembering too, his dining with the critical, uppity Pharisees, giving him an opportunity to directly challenge the self-righteous and the hypocritical religious leaders out to get him.

The Last Supper is not just a one off or isolated event, in that it connects back to Jesus’ many earlier meals, and then foreshadows future gatherings post-Resurrection, first with his disciples on the beach and then foreshadowing the Eucharistic gatherings from early church communities in homes to our contemporary celebrations, acknowledging his enduring Real Presence among us.

Every Holy Thursday, I like to display depictions of the Last Supper through the ages, reflective of not so much the clean cut and neat Leonardo da Vinci, but many homing in on the circumstances and people at the time of the painting, from Velasco’s Jesus with the Filipino street children, to the Tintoretto non-traditional portrayal. Says Claude Mostowik MSC: *“It is full of activity. People are busy serving. Servants anxiously looking for a place for themselves. A cat with its nose in a basket of dishes. One servant raising his hand to stop another speaking in order to hear Jesus. It is a scene full of distractions and interruptions. The suggestion is that our faith is messy and will never be perfect or complete; that our love may falter; our best resolutions and commitments wain over the long haul. The painting reminds us that whatever we bring – our moods, anxieties, concerns, sinfulness, distractions, busyness, heartaches and half-heartedness – Jesus still says ‘take’ and eat, ‘take’ and drink. These make up the body of Christ in the world. It is a call to not forget.”*

And so, we gather in spirit to give thanks for Eucharist as spiritual sustenance, bread for the journey of life, and Communion reminds us of Jesus uniting us through our being members of the Body of Christ and participating in the Eucharistic meal. Our appreciation perhaps is highlighted by our recent lengthy, and now current, hopefully brief, COVID enforced deprivation, of being there, and being nourished and strengthened by Eucharist together as friends, and *companions on the journey*, as the song reminds us.

john hannon

6th June 2021