

CELEBRATING THE FEAST OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

In a nursing home the residents were gathered in the chapel for the feast we are celebrating today, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, the feast of the Eucharist. One old woman, wheel-chair bound, was wearing two hats. A carer from the home tried to take one off, but the woman clung on tight to her two hats. The carer saw that in her efforts to tidy up the situation, she was now defeated. So she backed off, and let the old lady be.

Perhaps that lady, like the old-time prophets, was acting out a message to the gathered group. Perhaps she was saying: you all should wear two hats, i.e. you all should be your own individual selves - Ann, Bob, Brian, Carol, Tim, Kevin, Stephanie, Margaret, whatever - but you should also be what you are as a baptised follower of Jesus - i.e. another Christ.

Speaking of Holy Communion, St Augustine in the 400s in North Africa, said many wise and wonderful things about who we are as members, cells, limbs, of the body of Christ. Among other things he said: '*You are what you have received.*' In fact the first of the signs in which we receive Christ is the sign of bread. In the course of digestion, the bread and the person eating it become one. The bread is assimilated into the body of the person eating. When we receive Christ as the Bread of Life for our journey of life, we become ever more one with him. But there is a difference. Christ is not changed into us, into our bodies. No, we are changed, we are assimilated into Christ's body, i.e. we are incorporated into that extension of himself which is the body of Christians in the world today, his Church.

Profound implications follow for living our communion, our being joined and bonded to Christ and one another. These could hardly be better put than in words attributed to St Teresa of Avila - striking and beautiful words::

*Christ has no body now but yours,
no hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands. Yours are the feet. Yours are the eyes.
You are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
no hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.
Yes, Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

At the Last Supper, in a stunning way, Jesus acted out his care and concern for, his union and bonding with his followers. He got down on his knees like a slave, went round the

group, and washed the feet of his followers, one by one. It's interesting that St John, in his gospel of the Last Supper, does not mention the action of Jesus with the bread and wine. Instead he tells us of the action of Jesus with a basin of water and a towel. In this way John tells us the meaning of both actions of Jesus. It is all about belonging to one another in the same community of Christ, the community of faith, hope and love, the community which is the Church. It is all about bonding and union with one another. It is all about humbly serving one another. It is all about reaching out with warmth and care, with welcome and hospitality to our neighbour, the neighbour who could hardly be better described than '*the person who needs me now, right here, right now*'. As Mother Teresa, now Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, has said so eloquently:

I know you think you should make a trip to Calcutta, but I strongly advise you to save your airfare and spend it on the poor in your own country. It's easy to love people far away. It's not always easy to love those who live right next to us. There are thousands of people dying for a bit of bread, but there are thousands more dying for a bit of love or a bit of acknowledgement. The truth is that the worst disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis; it's being unwanted, it's being left out, it's being forgotten.

Love and service, welcome and hospitality, kindness and compassion, self-forgetfulness and generosity, that's what it means to follow Jesus, that's what it means to live his two commands. The one which we hear in the gospel today – '*Give them something to eat yourselves.*' The one too which we hear in the story of the Last Supper every time we pray the Eucharistic Prayer: '*Do this in remembrance of me.*'

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