

HOLY COMMUNION, A PACKAGE DEAL: 20TH SUNDAY B

The message of Jesus to us today is a promise. He promises to be for us just what he is. He's our Bread of Life, and he promises to be our nourishment, sustenance and support, all along our journey of life. Unlike some people, perhaps ourselves, Jesus keeps his promises. So today let us move in our thoughts to where he keeps his promise, the Upper Room in Jerusalem.

As Jesus is about to take leave of his disciples, and submit to the suffering and death which awaits him, he shows his intention to continue to be present to his friends and followers, but in a new and different way. The new form of his presence will be the bread and wine of a community meal celebrated in his memory. Just as human beings must eat and drink if they are to stay alive, so must the followers of Jesus eat and drink if they are to live by his teachings and example, and remain united with their Lord and one another. In becoming food and drink for their journey to God Jesus adapts himself to the need which all human beings have to both eat and drink in order to stay alive and well. This is to say that the new form of his presence will be one based on nourishment and refreshment, and will involve both eating and drinking.

It's important to remember, however, that communion with Jesus is not simply a private conversation with him. No, it's a package deal. When we receive and meet the risen Christ in Holy Communion, we are challenged to open our hearts to everyone else who belongs to Jesus, to everyone else who shares the same food and drink in the same meal, and to everyone else who forms one body with him. We are challenged to love others as he loves them. For this reason some words that have been put on the lips of Jesus by an anonymous writer seem very much to the point. Let's hear him saying those words to you and me now: -

I tried to catch your attention this morning.

Remember when you came back to your seat and closed your eyes and put your head down and talked and talked to me.

I wanted you to listen.

I wanted to tell you to open your eyes and look at my broken body all around you.

I tried to catch your attention that time the toddler stood on the seat and spoke to you, but you gave me a dirty look and humiliated me and didn't hear me.

I was the unmarried mother at the end of your seat, the old man in front of you, the family of seven children across the aisle from you - and I almost had the impression you disapproved of me.

I was the woman in the green coat whose husband left her this week and whose heart was being eaten out right through Mass, and a friendly smile or word would have been a little support to me.

I am your wife who cooked the lunch and coped with the children and all the burdens of the house while you read the Sunday newspaper and then went out.

I am your husband and your children and you stamped and huffed and gave us your cold silent treatment for three and a half long hours after Mass. This blackened and deadened the whole atmosphere of our home.

I am your mother and father and you have ignored and mocked and criticised and tortured as only a teenager knows how.

*I am your teenage son whom you've lost belief in and your nagging is driving me crazy.
I am your next door neighbour whom you spend so much time gossiping about and criticizing.
I am your fellow parishioner whom you meet every day in the street and you ignore me, busy about your own concerns.*

And it sickens me, all the coldness, all the squabbling and division and those endless running battles that scourge me and crown me with thorns. And then you pierce my side at Holy Communion with your empty words of love.

If you love me, feed my sheep, my starving sheep, and start in your own home.

Please don't keep me at bay any longer.

Don't talk to me. Listen.

I don't want you to go on loving my spirit and ignoring my body. I don't want you to open your mouth to receive my body and close your eyes and ears to shut it out.

When will you understand that you cannot have Holy Communion with me if you don't have communion with your brothers and sisters in your own family and parish?

Stop thinking of me as some kind of spiritual being in the skies. I am one with these people and you cannot have me without them.

On the last day, I won't ask you how many times you went to Mass - that is not your holiness. I will ask how your own family and neighbours fared, how your spouse and children grew in love and faith.

How did they live their Mass?

Please. Open your eyes and ears. Stop, look and listen, and make time for me by making time for them.

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