

Holy Spirit Province

PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

Date - 6 October 2020



SHARING AND CARING: 28TH SUNDAY A

There is always some context, some situation, that sheds light on the things we say and the things we do. What I am about to say presupposes the gathering together of Christian people for prayer, and especially for that great prayer, our Sunday Eucharist. Tragically, for many months now, many Christians here, there, and everywhere, have been unable to gather fully for our Sunday Eucharist as one community. Many of us have also been starved for months on end of Holy Communion, the nourishment of Jesus the Bread of Life for our shared lives of faith, hope, and love. In the context of this tragic situation, then, my words today are spoken with joyful and prayerful hope, that we may soon return to a more normal pre-Covid situation, for living life together in the community of Jesus.

If we look deep into our hearts, we will discover that among our many longings, there is one for good relationships with other people. We long to be at peace with them, to be at home with them, to live in harmony, to get on well with them, to cooperate with them, to support them and enjoy their company. In a nutshell, we have a very deep longing for companionship, community and communion. We know deep down, that try as we might to be masters of our own fate, to be captains of our own souls, to be rugged individuals, to make it on our own, to be self-made and self-sufficient, we simply cannot survive and we certainly cannot thrive without other people in our lives. Our longing for belonging makes that very clear.

While the French philosopher, John-Paul Sartre has said: 'hell is other people', he was surely overlooking the greater truth that so too is heaven. I suggest too that the call to community, to togetherness, is some part of what Jesus meant when he said that the kingdom of God, the rule and reign of God, is like a wedding feast to which all sorts of people have been invited. In fact, we cannot have the company of God, and we cannot experience and savour the love of God, without being connected with, and in contact with, other human beings. This is so true that the Second Vatican Council, in its document on the meaning of the Church, said that God saves us (and therefore re-makes and transforms us), not as isolated individuals but as members of a people - the people of God, a sharing people, a people in communion. (*The Church* #8)

But perhaps in response to God's invitation to dine together at the table of the Lord, to share Jesus Christ with one another, to enjoy others' company, to offer friendship and love to others,

both at the Eucharist and outside it, and to reach out to them with acceptance, interest, care and concern, that we keep saying like those selfish and self-centred individualists in the gospel today: 'No! Not now! Not yet! I have to work my farm. I have to look after my business. I have no time to mix with others, no time to socialize, no time to work with others. I don't want to get involved and mix with them. Don't expect to find me standing, kneeling, and sitting down with all those strangers, let alone meeting them personally and becoming friends. I'm just not coming to the feast. What do you take me for?'

If we find ourselves saying 'no' to others, no to companionship, no to communion, no to community, no to caring and sharing, how are we ever going to make God's dream come true for us - people of our faith, people of other faiths, and people of no faith? How on earth are we going to help God's dream come true for us all, God's dream for unity, peace and harmony, the dream that is reflected in that popular anthem: 'We are one, and we are many, and from all the lands on earth we come ... I am, you are, we are Australian'? If we keep saying 'no' to others, blocking them out of our lives, or worse, discriminating against anyone who is different, how are we going to make that dream of Jesus come true for his followers: 'There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all' (Ephesians 4:5), so 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 15:12)?

There is yet another application of the image of the wedding feast. It is summed up in the challenge that is expressed in a fourth-century inscription on the wall of an ancient church in Syria. It says to the people as they assemble for Sunday Eucharist: 'Let no one stay away. If you do, you will deprive the body of Christ of one of its members.'

So, let's remember that, any time we would rather stay home from church - to surf the net, wash the car, prune the roses, bake a cake, walk the dog, paint the spare room, watch the football, go for a swim, do anything at all except, join with the rest of the body of Christ in giving praise and thanksgiving to God. For God's gifts of life and health, and for God's gift of life together - life shared, life in common, the centre-piece of our parish and other Christian communities!

So, as we eagerly await the day when things get back to something like normal, may we find these words of Jesus truer than ever: 'blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled' (Lk 6:21)!

bgleesoncp@gmail.com