

Holy Spirit Province

PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

Date - 9 June 2020



BECOMING ANOTHER CHRIST IN HOLY COMMUNION

God is one, but also three, for this one God consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, when we talk about God, we are talking about relationships. We are saying that God exists in relationships within Godself, and in relationship to us! So we speak of God the Father as our Creator, of God the Son as our Saviour, and of God the Holy Spirit as our Sanctifier. In short, God is not alone, but a community. Neither are we alone, but a community. First of all, we are a community of human beings, in which all lives matter – no exception! Many of us are also make up the community of the followers of Jesus (the Church), with responsibilities to one another. We share life together as a Holy Communion, both before and after we receive the sacrament of Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ.

But because of the current corona virus pandemic, our togetherness as one has been much disrupted. For more than three months most of us have been deprived of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Only recently have no more than 20 persons been able to pray together at church, while practising social distancing, hand sanitising, and other hygiene precautions.

Over the weeks and months of quarantines and orders to stay at home, many Christians, at a physical distance from the action and separated from others, have watched services on a TV or computer screen. In doing so, they have been struggling with how to best live out their faith as a community. And yet, as St Paul of the Cross, Founder of the Passionists used to say, 'the love of God is very ingenious'. It has shown itself again and again in the maintenance and promotion of loving relationships, expressed in such good deeds as round-the-clock dedication of exhausted nurses and doctors to the care of the sick and the dying, giving of masks and even cooked meals to complete strangers, making phone calls to the isolated and lonely, sending cards to friends, or just staying at home to protect the most vulnerable.

Speaking of the sacrament of Holy Communion, St Augustine in the 400s in North Africa, said many wise 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 two signs in which we receive Christ is the sign of bread. In the course of digestion, bread and the person eating it become one. It is assimilated into the body of the one eating it. 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 by being assimilated into Christ's body. This is to say that we are further incorporated into his church, that extension of himself which is the body of Christians in the world today.

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 their feet, one by one. It's interesting that 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 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 (I add Covid19), BG; 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 inclusive generosity, that's what it means to follow Jesus. That's what it means to live community. That's what it means to live his Last Supper command: 'Do this in remembrance of me'!

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