

Homily for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2018

Active and noisy children can be a distraction for both parents and onlookers at Mass. Many a parent has made what they may feel to be a frustrated, angry or embarrassed walk to take a troublesome child outside. Such parents and families can feel isolated and their prayer time ruined. But should they feel isolated? Should their time with us at Mass be a frustrating one? One of the interesting things you see at Wednesday Mass is when a whole class of children attend from school. They sit amongst older parishioners who engage with them. There is often a big difference in that situation in the children's attitude from when they are a whole block totally separate and under the watchful eyes of teachers. When they know they are part of something with everyone else they can be very different. So too how do we engage with the struggling parents with children. Do we see them as a distraction and evidence of poor parenting? Or do we see them as coming into communion with us? How generous are we to embrace the isolated, the outsider, the different?

I never cease to be amazed at the generosity of some people. They see a need and immediately respond to help. We see that in the way the heartfelt efforts people are making to support those on the land suffering from the drought. At the same time what so often takes centre stage in the media is the opposite. Greedy, violent, dishonest and selfish people taking advantage of others. Criminals and of all kinds populate our vision. One could be forgiven for thinking that the world is insane.

We live with that contradiction and ambiguity in our world. But it is also within ourselves. Our generous spirit can be overwhelmed at times in our less than virtuous moments. For one person we can be an angel; for another we might seem to be the devil incarnate. That is the deep fissure that runs through our human nature. It is told in the story of Elijah whose zeal for God led him to do terrible things. He learnt a hard lesson. He had to give up his grasp on power and let God lead him. He had to let God even feed him!

At the heart of the Gospel this morning is the difficulty Jesus' hearers had in believing that he has "come down from heaven". In other words the "Incarnation" was then, and is now, a stumbling block for many. A person may be prepared to believe in God as Spirit, as creator of all. But to conceive that God would become flesh is hard to swallow. But that is just what Jesus asks of the people. I am the bread of life come from heaven, swallow that! The transcendent God seeks us out and befriends us. That is the uniqueness of the Christian vision. God wants to share the divine life with us.

Not to care for each other, St Paul says, is to grieve the Holy Spirit! We are always to think the best of the other and respect the dignity that is theirs as children of God. This might be looked upon as mere sentiment. The politics of daily life take the opposite for granted. But we do not come to Mass to escape for a few moments from the crazy extremes of our world. We come to pray for it in love for what God is doing for the world.

When we consume the Eucharist, the living bread, we find that we are irrevocably joined together with Christ. We might say "baked" together by the fire of love. The Word of God becomes flesh in us. Augustine once said in a homily:

"For surely this loaf was not made from one grain of wheat? The grains were separate before they came together to become one loaf. They were joined together by water, after first having been ground. For if the many grains are not ground and are not moistened by water, they could not come to this form, that we call a loaf. ... And then without fire, there is still not a loaf of bread."

Both joy and pain of life are ingredients in bread and wine. The joy of food to share that nourishes and the pain of the hard work of crushing the grain and grape, kneading the dough fermenting the juice, and the heat of the oven. Such is the way the life giving love of Christ is captured in the bread and wine we bring for consecration. For Paul what he says about forgiveness and good relationships are not only moral imperatives. He is spelling out the implications of our communion in Christ. We are the grains that are crushed kneaded together to be baked broken and shared.

Fr Graham