

PENTECOST 11 2024 All Souls' **CHRIST IN OUR VEINS** dtw

+ In the name of Christ, food for the journey, drink for thirsty travellers.

*Eat this bread, drink this cup,
Come to him and never be hungry.
Eat this bread, drink this cup,
Trust in him and you will not thirst*

*Christ is the bread of life,
The true bread sent from the Father
Eat his flesh and drink his blood,
And Christ will raise you up on the last day.*

These words are part of Hymn 714 in *Together in Song* written by the Taize Community in France. (I will be previewing or reviewing some of these hymns that we will be singing at 9.30.) They are based on John 6, the chapter that we are hearing over 5 progressive Sundays. You will remember that it all begins with the feeding of the multitude, an 'acted parable' if you like, that then gets unpacked by Jesus in the rest of the chapter and is summed up in his words, "I am the bread of life".

However, we don't just get the fairly comfortable description 'bread'; we get the more graphic words, 'flesh' and 'blood'. If we think they are 'in our face'; they were much more shocking for his original hearers, most of whom would have been devout Jews. To drink blood was taboo. The blood was considered to be the life of an animal; in sacrifice or in ordinary eating laws, the blood of an animal was to be poured or drained out as it is by western butchers today. We still use the expression "lifeblood"; that is because we know that severe loss of blood leads to death. The expression "lifeblood" is also used about anything that is essential to the survival of a business, a family, an organisation, a nation. Jesus Christ is the lifeblood of the Church.

This passage, unique to John, is of course full of Eucharistic overtones. John doesn't have the famous words of the last supper, as do the 3 synoptic gospels. Instead, we get the whole theology of the Mass bound up with the bread of life discourse in chapter 6. And yes, it is certainly in our face. Not only is Jesus saying, "Get your teeth into me, my words, my deeds, my life"; he is also saying "You are what you eat; you are what you drink". In the other gospels, when he takes bread and wine and says, "This is my body; this is my blood" his words are scandalous to his hearers, until they truly understand. To drink his blood was to receive his very LIFE. This is what we mean when we talk about 'the real presence'. It has nothing to do with literal flesh and blood; on the contrary, Jesus is the 'Lamb of God', because he ends the old covenant of repetitious sacrifice of bulls, goats and sheep and initiates the new covenant in his own blood upon the cross of Calvary once for all. But wait, there's more: he also gives us a perpetual memorial of food and drink that is his very presence with us here and now. When we drink his cup, we dare to drink his life; Christ in our veins! Every Sunday you leave this church with Christ in your veins, your lungs, your bone and marrow.

It is a wonderful joy to prepare children, along with their supporting families, for this spiritual nourishment, isn't it? - and to see their eyes open up as they discern Jesus in the Breaking of the

Bread. May our hearts burn within us, as at Emmaus, as we encounter the living presence of Christ and bear Christ in our lives to the world. O God, may we tremble, tremble, tremble! Tremble with all the fullness of Christ within us. Another ancient Celtic hymn says it all: (vs. 6, TIS 478 from St Patrick's Breastplate)

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

John 6 eventually concludes by observing that many of Jesus' wider band of disciples 'turned back and no longer went about with him'. In keeping with the metaphor, perhaps they had bitten off more than they could chew. 'So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'" The 12 felt right at home with Jesus. This small band of disciples (less one named Judas) would go on, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to ignite a fire that would spread to every nation on earth including Australia. How did they do it, this once fearful, timid group of disillusioned apostles? Well, St Paul, who called himself the least of the apostles after his post-Easter conversion, writes down his strategic plan for mission and ministry in his Letter to the Ephesians.

Jesus said, "my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them." (Jn 6.55-56) We are what we eat and drink: We are the body of Christ. Christ is our lifeblood. Christ is in our veins. We bear Christ to the world.

Finally, some words from a hymn by Robin Mann (TIS 538)

*Feed us now, Bread of life, in this holy meal;
Let us know your love anew; we hunger for you.
Feed us now, Bread of life, come and live within;
Let your peace be ours today, Lord Jesus, we pray.*

*Piece of bread, cup of wine; Lord, this food is good:
Love and mercy come to us, your promise we trust.
Piece of bread, cup of wine: who can understand
How his mercy works in these? Yet, Lord, we believe.*