

BEING LIVING BREAD FOR OTHERS dtw Pentecost 12 All Souls'

Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever..." John 6.51

In the Season after Pentecost, Year B, the journey through John chapter 6 takes 5 Sundays, today being the third. While the feeding of the multitude is recorded in each of the four gospels, the 'Bread of Life' discourse is unique to John, embracing a number of rich and poignant themes made even more powerful by the divine prefix "I am...", John's wonderful allusion to the great "I am" of Exodus. Jesus is "I am" in human flesh; "I am" incarnate.

John 6 is highly Eucharistic. Unlike the other 3 gospels which include the words of institution, "This is my body, this is my blood" at the last supper, John is silent. Later on, John 13 only records the washing of feet at that supper, which is quite remarkable when you think about it. Jesus' disciples, including ourselves today, are always in danger of simply enjoying the meal without *living that meal* for others. "If I have washed your feet, you also must wash others' feet". Is this another dominical sacrament that we all too often overlook except once a year on Maundy Thursday? In fact, it is intimately linked with broken bread. There is a prayer from the Vanderbilt collection, which grasps the important tension of this inner and outer ministry entrusted to us all:

*Holy Wisdom, God of abundant life, you call us to the banquet of your love. We find you in the gifts you give; we know you in the ones with whom we share this holy food, and in the bread of this table, your son, Jesus Christ. Grant that **we may be bread for others**, as he is bread for us. Amen*

We are not only privileged to feed on God's love, but we are called to 'sink our teeth' into a radical Christ-style of living. It is not for the faint hearted.

I count it my highest privilege to preside at the Breaking of the Bread. I have done so in a variety of different settings and for a variety of reasons, but always as a symbol of unity and wholeness in the brokenness of life. I am sure that you know in your own lives and work what it means to be broken. I know what it means. And let me tell you this, as I alluded last week: in some of my most broken days, weeks or months, I have discovered that it always comes

together somehow on Sunday and at the Breaking of the Bread. Why? The bread that we break is no mere symbol of Christ's love for us. It is the offering of broken humanity back to the very source of the Life, broken on a cross – the Life that can make us whole again – the Love that is our very reason for being, returned again in Sacrament: the Bread of Heaven. The empty chalice is not merely to be filled with Sevenhill wine – it is a vessel into which is poured the thank-offering of a million souls whose hopes, disappointments and dreams make their great response of love with us in company with angels. As our hands handle holy things, they do so in union with the hands of children who play, midwives who deliver, farmers who toil, athletes who celebrate, frightened refugees in detention or leaky boats and every sister or brother who cries for justice – indeed, the whole universe in its evolving 'Amen' to the Creator, Redeemer, Spirit God. Therefore, as another has put it, be careful when you touch bread.

Like the bread we break and the wine we pour out, the people of God are to be a presence to other people: a *real* presence. We, the clergy, are not called always to do, but often simply to *be*, be available, be approachable. We belong to that strange breed that has actually been commissioned to 'loiter with intent'. Pastorally of course! It is a priestly art that we need intentionally to develop; I certainly have had to in my often too driven life. The old word 'parson' comes close to this side of priesthood: it derives from 'person', being the 'Person in Community', the listener, the pastor, the reconciler the one in whom people, please God, may see the easy yoke of the Christ who lightens the load of life. But this task is entrusted to all who would live the Christ-style.

Let every Eucharist, priest and people, be our first. May our families, communities, and colleagues experience through our ministries and service what it means to be broken and given, like bread and wine, in service too. May every encounter we have as the people of God bring Christ's easy yoke and reconciling love. May we come into many situations, where simply by our affirming presence: forgiveness, healing and renewal come. This is what it means to be bread for others. Amen.

Let us pray together the *Prayer of the Chalice* (insert Reading Sheet)