

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

19th June 2022 - Corpus Christi

Readings (Year C): 1st: Genesis 14:18-20. Psalm: 109. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Gospel: Luke 9:11-17. 23-26.

Breath, Bread, food, nourishment is vital for all life. Not long after we have taken our first breath, we soon need some nourishing mother's milk. So our life then goes on.

Bread is surely the most relevant symbol of hope for a world in which half the population suffer from shortage of food. As I was thinking about this on Tuesday a 10 pm news item was about bread in Afghanistan, and how many people there now are so poor they can't even afford very stale bread. The staff of life: we used to talk of earning our daily bread. Little wonder that Jesus should choose bread as the memorial sign of his presence and care in the world.

St Luke, the doctor/ physician, is fascinated by food. Virtually every chapter of his gospel has mention of food or eating. It has been remarked that Luke presents Jesus either going to table, at a table, or coming from a table.

The conception of Jesus is celebrated in Mary's *Magnificat* as God filling the starving with good things.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a place name which means the house of bread. His first cot was a feeding trough borrowed from the animals.

Before beginning his public ministry he fasted for forty days and nights. He relied absolutely on the providence of the Father rather than turn stones into bread. There were meals of celebration, as in Levi's house or the return of the prodigal son. Meals to relax with friends, as with Martha & Mary. References to meals on the Sabbath. Jesus was the guest who brought to the table more than he received.

At various tables he brought pardon to the sinful, friendship to Zacchaeus. Much of his teaching was imparted at meals. There he drew attention to the foolish pride of those who vied for honour at table. He taught that our tables should be anticipation of the final messianic banquet with special consideration being given to the beloved poor of God. Lazarus, the beggar at the gate of Dives, is the personification of God's beloved poor.

At the Last Supper Jesus moves among the apostles as one who serves, reminding of the story about God as the master who dons the apron to serve the faithful servant.

The behaviour of Jesus at table so challenged the accepted pious traditions that he drew condemnation upon his head. He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. There was a loud complaint that 'he welcomes sinner and eats with them.'

When he taught his followers a prayer which would express their Christian identity, the petition for today's needs is a request for daily bread, and is the central petition in the prayer.

He arranged that the celebration of his memory would be in a meal: 'Do this in memory of me.'

The risen Lord was recognised by two disciples at the breaking of bread. And would you believe what he asked on the dumbfounded apostles when he appeared to them in the Upper Room: 'Have you anything here to eat?'

Luke continues the food theme in his 2nd work the Acts of the Apostles. The Breaking of Bread was one of the cornerstones of the early community, and continues to be so in every Catholic church ever since.

When Peter was establishing his credentials as a witness his claim was 'We have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead.'

The day when Jesus fed the multitude in the lonely place, today's gospel, it is like a summary of his mission. He welcomed the crowds: he taught them: he brought healing to those who needed it. And he fed them.

Bread is a symbol of the outreach of God to his children. All four gospel writers tell of this story

St Cyprian, commenting on the Lord's Prayer and daily bread writes:

'This can be understood in both a spiritual and literal sense, because either understanding is a God given help to salvation. Christ is the bread of life, and this does not belong to everyone, but is ours. We say 'Our Father' because he is the Father of those who understand and believe; in the same way we call Christ our bread, because he is the food of those who are members of his body.'

Different reflections for this feast day: last word from *Pope St Paul VI 'Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the Living Heart of each of our parishes.'*

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