

Reflection for Wednesday of Holy Week 2020

Luke 9: 12-17

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.' But he said to them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said, 'We have no more than five loaves and two fish-unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.' For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, 'Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.' They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Another picture to imagine but a much larger canvas than the two previous ones this week with this enormous crowd spilling out across the hillside hanging on every word our Lord spoke to them. Even the mega churches of the United States do not manage to rival this number of people gathered in one place to listen to God's word. We are told by Luke only the number of men present but other accounts of this event tell us that women were also present and that young boy who features only in John's account of this miracle cannot have been the only child present. So, all in all, an enormous crowd riveted by all that Jesus taught them, all the instruction, the advice and of course the wonderful stories which must have both entranced and intrigued them.

But the day was drawing to a close, the sun was setting and the light fading and with these the realisation that it's been a long day out on that hillside and stomachs are now beginning to protest at the lack of sustenance. Energies are flagging and I suspect that having stood still for so long there arose a certain restiveness. Jesus, of course, saw all this and recognised that spiritual food alone was not enough, and these people needed to assuage their physical hunger and quickly. The disciples also recognised the need for these people to be fed but their solution was to tell them to leave; return to the surrounding villages and find their own provisions there. Jesus of course has a totally different solution and having ascertained that there is a rich banquet of five loaves and two fish to be had orders the disciples to martial that great crowd into manageable groups of fifty and for everyone to take the pressure off their legs and sit on the grass.

My guess is that those disciples found such an order incredibly perplexing and must have asked themselves ‘How on earth can such a paltry amount of food satisfy a few of those present let alone all of them?’ But whatever their private thoughts they did as they had been bidden to do and again, we can imagine the groups forming and a growing rise of anticipation, excitement even, that their hunger was about to be satisfied. And of course, the question on everyone’s lips just where was the food to come from as there were certainly no home delivery services on offer at that time. No little scooters bearing Domino pizzas! How could there be food on order here on this deserted hillside and if there is what will it be?

And then we read of Jesus taking in his hands, the loaves, the fish, these symbols of God’s beneficence towards us, His children, and having held them up to heaven he blessed them, and he broke them. Broke them into so many pieces that **all** could be fed; **all** could be satisfied.

Again, can you imagine the grunts and exclamations of pleasure as this royal banquet was shared between them. Each guest ate of the best, savouring the flavours of that bread, those fish. What meal however sumptuous would or could ever compare with this one? When would they ever again eat in such company which must surely have embraced all kind and condition of men and women?

And just to complete this broad-brushed picture we see those twelve baskets of left overs being gathered up; the equivalent of doggy bags to be taken home and eaten later while looking back and remembering all the wonder and the mystery of that day on the hillside culminating in a feast finer than any prepared by the most talented cordon bleu chef.

And for us on the hillside of self-isolation and self-distancing what has this story to teach us?

When we recognise the growing hunger of those who are lonely, afraid, and lacking hope; those whose strength is failing as the days of crisis grow longer what can we do? Are we utterly impotent? Do we just tell them to go away and find food to answer such hungers for themselves? Surely that cannot be the case. No, I believe the answer has to be that we are called to bring our own individual small contributions, our own bread, our own fish which are in the form of our contacts with people in whatever manner they are made and more importantly our prayers and give them over to our Lord. Give them to our Lord so that He may lift this spiritual food to heaven, bless it and break it with His scarred hands so that it will be fractured into the bread, the fish that is necessary to feed those who hunger with love, with consolation, with hope and above all with His presence beside them. I believe that somehow our prayers, our contacts are in this way once touched and broken by Christ able to spread out further and

further like ripples across a pond. Our prayers, our contacts will in this way create an ever-growing storehouse of spiritual food to bring blessing to those whose hungers of despair, of worry and anxiety, of hopelessness need so desperately to be fed at this time.

Tomorrow is Maundy Thursday when we will read of the Last Supper when Jesus again broke bread for us. Broke that loaf and shared it among His disciples with the hands that within less than twenty- four hours would themselves be broken. Broken and scarred so that the world could know for a certainty that God understands from personal experience just what it is to suffer in body, mind and spirit. That breaking of bread continues each and every day but most particularly on Sundays when the celebrant lifts the bread aloft and declares it to 'be broken for you.' Broken for you, broken for me.

At the present time we can only take the bread and the wine spiritually and here I quote from an article by Angus Ritchie in the Church Times: 'At this time, when most worshippers are unable to receive the sacrament, we must enter into Christ's self-offering through spiritual communion, and through a deeper contemplation of the echoes of the Passion in our experience. As St Thomas Aquinas explains, in spiritual communion "an ardent desire" to receive Christ sacramentally leads on to him granting us "a loving embrace as though we had already received him." As we see those hands again breaking that bread, that bread which is His body we are touched yet again by His loving embrace. Isn't that the most wonderful and consoling thought in these times where touch has become so rare? There is no actual bread, there is no actual wine but there is and always will be that loving embrace made with this those broken hands

I pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit each of our offerings to this communion feast however insignificant or tiny they may appear to us may be touched by Christ and then broken and blessed in His name so that in ways we can never begin to understand others may be fed and know the loving embrace Of Christ in their lives.

All that I am, all that I do,
all that I'll ever have I offer now to you.

Take and sanctify these gifts
for your honour Lord.

Knowing that I love and serve you
is enough reward.

All that I am, all that I do,

all that I'll ever have I offer now to you.

All that I dream, all that I pray,
all that I'll ever make I give to you today.

Take and sanctify these gifts
for your honour Lord.

Knowing that I love and serve you
is enough reward.

All that I am, all that I do,
all that I'll ever have I offer now to you.

Bless Bread, Share It by Ian Adams

How easily we take food and drink for granted

The invitation here is to become present to the food and the drink,
to the moment, and to the provider.

To give thanks for the food,
to bless it and to receive its blessing,
and to bless each other in the sharing.

Find beautiful words that open up the mystery.
Make them true to you.
Accessible to those sharing.
And reflective of the setting in which they are offered.

Bless bread.

Share it.