

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(Proverbs 9:1-6 / John 6:51-58)
16.08.2015

What we have in the gospels is the story of God who wants to come close to us, so close that we can see him with our own eyes, hear him with our own ears, touch Him with our own hands (Henri Nouwen).

Jesus' words in today's Gospel carry a call to enter into communion with Christ in every domain of our life, recognising how He has entered into communion with us in every domain of our whole being.

We know from the end of John 6 that some followers of Jesus bristled at his words about the need to eat His flesh and drink His blood.

Some felt that this long admired Teacher was asking them to go too far with such talk about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. They could not accept it: *There were those who turned away and deserted Him.*

Jesus must have known that some would take offence. Yet He chose to speak thus. We may wonder: Just what is so significant about these words?

What is it that Jesus wants his followers to grasp that is so central in his self-disclosure? Surely, it is to believe that He, the Son of God, has taken on our flesh, become *fully human*.

The full humanity of Jesus is something many Christians still struggle with.

While believing in the incarnation, some may even be uneasy about accepting all that is implied in Jesus having fully assumed our human condition!

But this is not all. In inviting His followers to drink His blood, Jesus is showing them that His way is one of self-giving love, even to death on the cross. This complete self-emptying on the cross, this *Kenosis* shows that the Son of God lived to draw near to us in our human weakness. He became like all human creatures, willingly undergoing suffering and death. Does this challenge some of us?

We can find it easier to deal with a Jesus far removed from us, than a Jesus who draws so utterly close as to have experienced all that we experience.

The Epistle to the Hebrews insists: *Christ was tempted in every way that we are.*

In the man Jesus of Nazareth, God came into this world to share our life – fully. Christ did not skim the surface of being human.

The incarnate Son of God espoused the physical conditions of every human being, living in a real body – completely: He felt emotions; knew desire; had a human psychology.

Scripture scholar and psychologist, Fran Ferder, reflects on what *Word made flesh* in John's Gospel actually means, and she states it unflinchingly, in words that are direct, perhaps shocking to some: *The incarnate word was no longer a message to deliver, but a person to know, a person like us, a person of flesh. A baby who gurgled and burped. A child who ran in the wind. A youth filled with ideas and flooded with feelings. A blue-collar worker with calloused hands. A neighbour who slept and ate, laughed and cried, fished and visited. A friend whose arms knew how to hug, whose genitals felt desire, whose heart yearned for love. A person like us.*

The whole John 6 discourse can be read as an invitation to draw close to this Christ who humbled Himself, to draw close to us, become one of us, still more, to *be one with us*.

Are we not invited to allow Christ to draw close to us in all *our* human experience?

When Christ invites us to eat His flesh and drink His blood, what He is saying amounts to this: *Let me become one with you, part of you. Let me enter into the whole of your life.*

Let me become so close to you that I am part of your body.

Assimilate me.

Welcome me into your life.

This called Jesus' listeners, and invites us now, to relate to Him and His message, not just with our heads, not just as a fine teaching, but in an all-embracing way.

It is an invitation to make the person of Christ the centre of our life: to relate to Jesus in all the emotional, psychological and physical capacities of our being, as much as in, what we sometimes call, *the spiritual dimension*, as if our spiritual being was some part floating above the rest.

To over-focus on the spiritual *dimension*, is to ignore our full human make-up. In so compartmentalising our lives, we actually create certain no-go areas for Christ.

It can be more convenient betimes to box Jesus into a “spiritual” zone than to accept that He inhabits and acts in all of our life.

Whereas, giving Jesus access to all of our life can frighten us.

Accepting total communion with Jesus puts an end to any notion of God-free areas in our life; puts paid to the thought that there are certain domains in which we are free to do as we please without reference to the Lord of all life, or to others.

When truly at one with Christ, our lives belong no longer to ourselves alone.

Gathered here at Eucharist today, it is vital – no, it is liberation – to realise the full implications of His saving act. Jesus is with us, here, as God-for-us, God-with-us, God-within-us.

Jesus gives all there is to give. In the Eucharistic Prayer, we hear him say: *This bread is my flesh given for you, this is my blood shed for you ... this is me for you!*

Christ, who becomes one with us in our Eucharistic celebration, who invites us to partake of His flesh and blood, shows us here around His Table that *the whole of our lives* belong to Him and that we belong to each other, as we share communion.

As one body, one spirit in Christ, we dare to give our lives to God and others as Jesus gave Himself back into the Father's hands for us. We respond to his invitation: *Do this in memory of me.*

St Augustine dared to say to those who approached the communion Table: *Become what you receive.*

May our ‘Amen’ as we receive communion today be our consent to allow Christ to live within us and become a gift of self-giving love in the whole of our lives.

Amen!