

Sunday Homily

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

22 AUGUST 2021

YEAR B

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood
abide in me, and I in them.”

John 6:56

Illustration

Long ago in a faraway land, a boy left home to seek his fortune. Before he left, his father gave him a key. The boy was not impressed. “What use is this key,” he asked his father, “without the door it opens?” His father replied, “It’s all I have to give you, so please take it.”

Unfortunately, the boy failed to make his fortune. One day, not having eaten for days, he stole an apple. The stallholder caught him. This country had a very strict legal system and for this theft he was thrown into a Chinese box of cells, each one unlocked by a different key, and each one more unpleasant than the last. He ended up in the deepest dungeon, little removed from hell itself.

The boy was in despair, when he remembered the key his father had given him. “At least,” he thought, “if it fits the first door, I can remove myself from this deepest pit, which has the largest rats I’ve ever seen.” So he tried the key and, to his surprise and joy, it opened the door. Feeling he had nothing to lose, though he knew it wouldn’t work, he tried the key in the next door, and amazingly it opened that door too!

And so he went from door to door and found every one was opened by that one key his father had given him. Freed from prison, he made his way back home and threw himself at his father’s feet in gratitude, repenting that he’d ever doubted him.

Gospel Teaching

St John’s Gospel doesn’t contain an account of the institution of Holy Communion, but this passage in chapter 6 is surely John’s version. Christ is saying we have to feed off him to live the abundant life. His body and blood are the true bread and the true vine which ensure we remain in God. Since the true bread and the true vine are spiritual phenomena, they could be represented in the physical realm by anything we chose, as long as we were perceiving the spiritual reality within them, which is Christ himself. Christ chose bread and wine – bread was a staple of survival and wine a staple of celebration.

Thus every Communion is a statement of our dependence on Christ for spiritual survival, but also a celebration of the richness of the spiritual life we share, which is a million times greater than simple survival. It's as if we're given a food voucher, but then find its purchasing power is limitless. It's as if we are given a day to live and then find it is the first day of the rest of our life. It's as if we get a job as a cleaner in a large company, only to find we get the same pay as the chairman.

Communion is so basic, so primitive. We are invited to feed off another person, like babies at the breast. And just like children who will discover that their mothers have a bottomless treasure-trove of love, that will feed them long after the milk has dried up, we learn that the new life in Jesus, as lived out in a fellowship of faith, is more than merely a piece of bread and sip of wine. It's as if we come to light a candle and then find it's a floodlight shining on the rest of our week.

Communion is so physical, standing or kneeling side by side, rubbing elbows, chewing bread and holding the cold metal cup, and yet its effects are so spiritual, proclaiming our spiritual unity in the one body of Christ. We commemorate Christ's painfully physical death on the cross of two thousand years ago and, in the same act, celebrate, in the here and now, his rising again in our hearts and souls.

Application

As we follow the sacred round of the Church's year, let us not hold back from the table. Rather let us gather regularly, even when it feels more like a duty than a joy. We don't come just for our own sakes.

Hear what Paul says in Ephesians 5: "make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil". By joining other pilgrims in the upper room, we are expressing solidarity with all that is holy, all that is good in the whole world: more than that, we are helping God to create the antidote to evil, by embodying Christ in the world.