**SERMON 02.08.15**

2 Sam 11.26-12.13a

Ps 51.1-12

Eph 4.1-16

John 6.24-35

The Gospel for Sunday flows right out of an extraordinary miracle. The people were grumbling to Jesus, “Our ancestors ate manna in the desert. It is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ What sign can you do, that we may see it and believe in you?”

A strange question, since only the day before Jesus had multiplied five barley loaves till there was enough to feed this same huge crowd. What a sign that had been. How did they forget in a day?

Jesus' replied, “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” An answer that either they did not understand or wanted to accept.

God sent the manna, and God sends Jesus, the everlasting manna.

Bread obviously means different things to different people.

I don't know when it first happened, when I became aware of just what goes on in our body when we eat bread. It may have been when I was studying for nursing, I grasped just how amazing the intricate mechanism of chewing and swallowing is.

Nursing taught me that even before we think of eating, we must be able to discern what to eat - what is healthy and what isn't good for us. Then food has to be broken into mouthfuls and mixed - not too dry, chewed to be liquified and then swallowed before it can release nourishment into our bodies. Each stage requires a process of decisions, essential enzymes and muscular actions, which we take for granted.

It was only much later when I became a Christian and the breaking of Christ's body was so clearly part of taking and eating the bread of life, the bread of the Eucharist, that I realised the wonder of Jesus offering himself for our nourishment was so similar in form to the physical process of eating bread.

Today we could underline the four familiar words that we always hear at the Eucharist: “take,” “bless,” “break,” and “give.” (Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples saying . . . ')

As the bread of life, Jesus too was taken, broken, blessed and given. Without taking Jesus, we become spiritually malnourished. Without chewing on the Word of God, meditating on it, praying and wrestling with it as we apply its truth in our lives, we cannot take it in and swallow the living bread. In order for the life of Jesus to be active in us, we must let the bread bless us with its health and nourishment. Then as the friends of Christ, we are called to give it to others.

Remembering that In ancient times, to eat something was thought to imbue us with its strength and qualities. Then deep within us, as Christians, every time we receive the Eucharist, we are being transformed a little more fully into the Body of Christ, so that the divine love that made us and that flows through us can become more fully expressed in the world.

Henri Nouwen gives us an explanation of how this works. At the beginning of “Life of the Beloved,” Henri who lived for the last 10 years of his life as a chaplain at a L'Arche community for people who are mentally and physically disabled, reflects that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by being taken, blessed, broken, and given, manifests His ‘Belovedness,'

In our lives our 'taken-ness' - if there was such a word - is the claim God makes on us for His divine purpose to be lived out in our lives. When you and I were baptised in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the deepest truth about ourselves was revealed to the world: that we are the Beloved of God.

Yet it takes a lifetime to live into the truth of our Belovedness, to make it incarnate in everything we say and do, mirroring Jesus' life in us.

The second is to recognise that we are “blessed.” The word “blessing” comes from the Latin word, benedicere, which literally means to speak well of someone, to say good things about someone. To be affirmed is to know that we are valued not just because of something we did or because we have a particular talent, but simply because we are. To be blessed is a powerful thing.

We are chosen and blessed. And we are broken, too. Everyone in this room is broken. We all have places of loneliness or fear, places of disappointment, shame, or grief. We all know the pain of broken relationships, and we all face death, which Henri calls “the most radical manifestation of brokenness.”9 Accepting and befriending our brokenness is part of the long journey of entrusting our whole selves to the care of God, so that, as St. Paul puts it, we know that “whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's” [Romans 14:8]. And it is important to place our brokenness in the light of God's blessing, to experience it within the context of God's love.

We are chosen, blessed, and broken - to be given. “Our greatest fulfilment lies in giving ourselves to others,” writes Henri. “...Our humanity comes to its fullest bloom in giving. We become beautiful people when we give whatever we can give: a smile, a handshake a kiss, an embrace, a word of love, a present, a part of our life... How different would our life be were we truly able to trust that it multiplied in being given away! How different would our life be if we could but believe that every little act of faithfulness, every gesture of love, every word of forgiveness, every little bit of joy and peace will multiply and multiply as long as there are people to receive it... and that -- even then -- there will be leftovers!”

Nouwen goes on to explore the four expressions of Jesus' - taken, blessed, broken and given. He says, "these words summarise not only my life as a priest as I take bread, bless it, break it and give it. These words also summarise my life as a Christian, because, as a Christian, I am called to become bread for the world: break that is taken, blessed, broken and given. Most importantly, however, they summarise my life as a human being because in every moment of my life somewhere, somehow the taking, the blessings, the breaking and the giving are happening.” (Life of the Beloved, 41-42)

Christian de Cherge, the Trappist Abbott who was martyred in Algeria in 1996, told this story of his first communion. He grew up in a Roman Catholic family in France and on the day of his first communion he said to his mother: “I don’t understand what I’m doing.” She answered simply: “It’s okay, Christian, you don’t have to understand it now, later you will understand.”

Jesus, no doubt, must have given his disciples the exact same advice at the Last Supper, at their first communion. When he offered them bread and said, “This is my body,” and then offered them wine and said, “This is my blood,” he knew they would not have understood. There would have been considerable confusion and bewilderment: How are we supposed to understand this? I suspect that in the face of their non-understanding, like Christian de Cherge’s mother, Jesus would have also said: You don’t have to understand it now, later you will understand.

Indeed in instituting the Eucharist at Last Supper, Jesus simply asked them to eat his body and drink his blood. This mystery can work in us also, nourishing and healing us, even if we can’t fully understand it.

So, consider this for a moment - What is the food that you need for your life’s journey? How have you been taken, blessed, broken and shared?

According to Pope Francis, in the Eucharist we are we given something that keeps us from hardening our hearts and allows us to love someone who doesn’t love us. What is that something?

Christ’s gift of himself in the Eucharist is not only a model for the Christian life, but acts to transform us interiorly. Every time that we participate in holy Mass and we are nourished by the body of Christ, the presence of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit acts in us, shaping our hearts, communicating interior attitudes to us that translate into behaviours according to the Gospel. Thanks to Jesus and to his Spirit, even our life becomes ‘broken bread’ for our brothers.

In our Eucharist this morning, we see “a sign of God's desire and intent to feed not only us but this whole hungry world.”

Once again, may we behold what we are.

May we become what we receive.

**Eucharistic Preface**

Let us lift up our hearts.

 We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

 It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right to give you our thanks and praise, O God,

for you have sent us bread from heaven

to give life to the whole world.

You are above all and through all and in all,

and by your word all things were created.

You fed your people with manna from heaven,

and even when they defied you,

if they turned from their callous ways,

you fed them again with your wisdom and truth.

In your Son, Jesus Christ,

you have offered yourself to us as the bread of life

that we might be nourished and built up

as one body in the bond of peace.

Though he was murdered by those he fought to save,

you raised him from the depths of the earth

to fill the whole universe with his gifts

and baptise all things into one body,

held together by one spirit, under one Lord.

Therefore with .....

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**Declaration of Absolution**

God, in tender mercy, does not cast us aside,

or withdraw the Holy Spirit from us,

but saves us, washing away our sin

and cleansing us from our guilt.

Sisters and Brothers,

 your sins are forgiven;

 be at peace.

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**Commission & Benediction**

Go out from here and live lives worthy

of the one calling which we all share.

In humility, gentleness and patience,

speak only what is true and loving

and so grow into the unity that is ours in Christ.

And may God the creator reshape your hearts;

May Christ Jesus, the bread of life, sustain you always;

and may the Holy Spirit unite you in the bond of peace.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

 In the name of Christ. Amen.

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