

Disciples: A Community of Jesus's Friends

The Irish can be a funny lot. It is sometimes hard to figure them out. Take for instance the ancient monastery of Glendalough. This monastic community was founded in the Wicklow Hills of Ireland over 13 centuries ago. It is nestled in the hills alongside a beautiful lake. Today one can still see the old St. Kevin's chapel and in the woods around the lake the evidence of the little huts in which the solitary monks lived.

Now the Glendalough monastery was a community and yet the monks lived very much like hermits, solitary and removed from one another. I guess we all need some alone time and space. But as Christians we are above all social. In fact, it seems we are all, in our humanity social beings. Our faith is a community faith, best lived and expressed in how we live with one another, celebrate with one another and care for one another.

It is no small thing that Jesus surrounded himself with a group of disciples, and with them sought to share good news with crowds of people. After his death as the Risen One, he appeared most often to groups of disciples. It was when they gathered to share the faith they had in this Jesus that this community of Jesus's friends had their hearts opened and were able to "see" that he was risen and remained among them.

It is also no small thing that where we are most aware of our Christian faith is when we join together to share our stories, and around the Eucharistic table, break bread and share the cup. Our faith is all about the Risen Jesus, not just in "me", but in all of us.

One of the great gifts of the Second Vatican Council was the recovery of the original meaning of the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. These are our prime community sacraments. They all express our belonging to a community of believers.

Very often around this time in the Easter season, we have the honour and pleasure of celebrating the significance of these sacraments. It might be in a Baptism or it might be when we witness the Confirmation of some young people in our community. Often it is welcoming some of our young members to the table of the Lord for the first time in their first Eucharist. What a step in their life of faith as they find themselves, like others coming to the table with their fellow community members.

They are no longer left out, only able to watch as others, Mom and Dad, older brothers and sisters go to communion. More than once we have seen them come up with their family and stand saying: "Can I have a cookie too?" Now they are no longer on the outside looking in. This is their table too, for it is the table of their community. Sharing Eucharist together – we are a community of believers.

This faith of a whole community in many ways underpins the words and actions of Jesus. He spoke to crowds of people. He gathered a community of disciples. He acted to heal and reconcile relationships. So often he sought to include all, to liberate all, to bring back those who found themselves isolated and left out. Jesus revealed an openness to all, especially the lost, the wounded, the poor and the excluded. We this time again in the Gospels. The Gospel writer Matthew offers one of the fullest expressions of this communal love. We can see it in the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes with which the sermon begins. (Matt.5:1-12)

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