

Homily Fr Dispin John 14/6/2020 Corpus Christi Sunday
St John's Mitcham www.stjohnsmitcham.com.au

On the second Sunday after the lockdown began, I was sitting in our church here. After having competed my first online mass that day, all by myself, I had the doors shut and I was sitting in one corner of the church. I was deeply lost in thoughts and prayer and went through all sorts of emotions of pain and loss and even frustration. After a while, I got up and walked to the door. When I opened the door I saw one of our elderly parishioners standing there. I smiled at her and said that there was no mass. She said that she knew that. She then told me that she just wanted to look at the tabernacle through the window and when she knelt down to pray outside the doors of our church, she was praying that the church doors would somehow open miraculously so that she could go and kneel before the Blessed Sacrament. And just then I had opened the doors. She was a bit startled and the joy in her was expressed in her tears when I invited her into the church and it became even more emotional when I gave her communion. These days, when I take communion to our parishioners, I can see the same kind of longing for the Eucharist. We hunger and thirst for the Lord.

It is a bit strange that we celebrate this magnificent feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi, and we are advised to keep a distance from one another. The whole purpose of Jesus coming into our world and giving us his body and blood as nourishment is so that we can be closer to God and to one another. By giving us himself as food for the journey, Jesus is attaching himself to each one of us as inseparable and yet, we are asked to keep away from each other and still worse, from the Eucharist, from attending mass.

When we travel, or when people we love go away for a long time or short time, do we not go through some photos or letters sent by them. We remember the good times and then we relive those memories. Memories are powerful and they can be life giving. It's interesting to note that many of the prayers made by the people of the Old Testament are centred on reminding God, just in case God's divine memory is slipping, of the promises God made to save them. When the chosen people face new trials, their insurance against disaster is the promise of God to see them through their time of pain. They hold fast to that word of promise. Every new experience of want or suffering serves to keep alive the memory of God's promises. Thus their prayers of intercession are made to jolt God's memory, to play back that promise, to hold God accountable to that promise.

But what happens when the people come into plenty and are having a great life? Do they remain faithful to *their promises* to God in the midst of prosperity? In today's first reading Moses reminds his own people of the need to

remember God: he notices that as the people get richer, their memories get poorer. In the midst of comfort God appears as unnecessary as a fire brigade at a picnic.

If the people do not want God to forget them in their affliction, God does not want the people to forget him in their affluence. So, God reminds the people that when they are safely installed in their new homes with security devices to keep out the uninvited, with their two-car garage, excellent salary, fringe benefits and enlightened retirement plan, they should still remember who it was who walked with them through the wilderness. Prosperity has made them a thankless people.

In the desert the people learned that they could not continue their journey without being sustained by the word of God. This experience was to teach them that they could not live on bread alone: when the bread ran out and the water dried up, their very survival depended on the word of God making new life possible for them. It was the creative and life giving word of God which brought them the manna – their daily bread.

In today's Gospel John picks up the theme of the manna and contrasts the bread the Jewish ancestors ate in the desert with the new bread of life given by Jesus. In the person of Jesus there is a new word of God and a new bread from heaven. Now the Word of God has become flesh, and the bread of heaven is the very life of Jesus himself. To eat this bread is to have a share in the life of God himself; it is to participate in eternal life.

It is at the Last Supper that Jesus gives himself as food and drink to us, his followers: "This is my body which will be given up for you. This is my blood which will be shed for you. Do this in memory of me." During the last meal of his earthly life Jesus charges his disciples to keep his memory alive by gathering together to break bread. Whatever else they do, *his followers must remember to eat in his name.*

Each of the Eucharistic Prayers expresses the purpose of our gathering: the refusal to forget what Jesus has done for us in his body. We keep the memory fresh; we celebrate it anew; and in celebrating we receive new life for our own journey in faith. Whether we live in the midst of affliction or affluence or pandemic as we do now, we come together in whatever possible ways as a community to profess that what Jesus did for us has a continuing importance. Our celebration of the Eucharist keeps us from being a thankless people and keeps us grounded in our God who has given us His everything so that we can continue to live. Thank you Jesus for the Eucharist, your sacred body and blood.

