

30 May – First Eucharist

For the historian, there is always a little bit of ancient history lying in the bottom of the cupboard. But this little heirloom is priceless and precious; it is my First Communion certificate. Whenever I look at it, it always brings back fond memories. For many Catholics, even those who perhaps do not practise their faith too regularly, their First Communion day is etched in their memories, a special moment, celebrating with family and friends, a significant landmark in our journey of faith. Mine was celebrated on 6 November 1977 in the parish of St Oliver Plunkett in Pascoe Vale. When I look at this certificate I have very fond memories of my childhood and my strong connection with this parish. As a child, my humble parish church was like St Peter's Basilica in Rome, big and full of significance, the only church that mattered for me. I have trained in many parishes; I have served as a priest in six parishes and am about to serve in another one, I have travelled to parishes across Australia and lived in an Italian parish for a year, but nothing can ever replace my sense of Pascoe Vale being my 'home' parish where I first experienced a powerful sense of belonging that has defined my journey as a Christian and shaped my life as a priest.

To the children making their First Eucharist; this may be your parish for one year, ten years, twenty years or more. Regardless of the length of time, today you stand around this table and receive the Bread of Life because you belong to Jesus. You take another step on the journey of life and faith that first began in the waters of Baptism when you were called by God and entered into the faith community. Today the world connects us in extraordinary ways through the iphone, the ipad and social media. And yet, in the life of faith there is a wonderful connection that comes to us in Baptism, that comes to us here at the table of the Lord, that comes to us from being part of a living community doing what Jesus did- we gather together and pray, we take the gifts of bread and wine and bless God the giver of all good gifts, these gifts become the new life of Jesus and what we receive transforms our lives in order to be people of good news and joy to our world. On this feast of the Trinity, the great mystery of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are reminded even more of the great outpouring of life and grace that we receive from God.

While it is always a joyful and proud moment to watch children celebrate their First Eucharist, the occasion should deepen within each one of us an ever greater appreciation of who and what we receive. The Church teaches that the Eucharist is food for life, food for the journey, food to nourish us. We live in a country of great abundance. But in this celebration, as disciples of Jesus, we call to mind those who are hungry, lonely, cold, poor or homeless. We remember the people of Nepal, struggling to build their shattered country, for refugees driven from their homelands. We pray for farmers around our country desperate for rain to break a savage drought. And before we go and celebrate with our family and friends, we will make a place for these people here at the altar of life and for all of us, let our sincere prayer be, 'Lord, through the gift of the Eucharist help me to fill the world with your peace, your joy, your mercy and your hope.'

The gift of the Eucharist transforms our lives; the life of the Trinity binds us as one family of faith and fills us with the grace of God's love. Just as Jesus did at the Last Supper, we take the gifts of bread and wine in memory of him because this is the death we celebrate, this is the new life we proclaim, this is the vision we await.