

7 June 2015

I feel a great closeness to the feast of Corpus Christi for a number of reasons. As a priest, the word and the sacraments are at the heart of our lives and ministry. But the Eucharist is the core sacrament that defines our ministry and our Catholic tradition – gathering the people of God and celebrating our unity around the altar, leading the mystery of this great prayer in the name of Christ and his Church, nourishing the lives of the faithful with Jesus the Bread of Life. Last weekend the parishes of Flemington and Kensington celebrated First Eucharist. They were both wonderful and prayerful celebrations, somewhat poignant given that I am about to be transferred. But I reminded the children and their families of the importance of belonging and the sacrament of the Eucharist binds us to Jesus and to each other when we gather at the table of life.

The feast of Corpus Christi is close to me because it is the name of the seminary here in Melbourne where I spent nine years preparing for ordination. Nine years was a big chunk of my life but my seminary years at Corpus Christi were happy and fulfilling years, challenging in many ways but also truly blessed where I made many friends and had a number of different people assist me to grow in my knowledge and love of God, his Church, the Gospel and the realities of pastoral life for a diocesan priest. I was fortunate in the many opportunities that my seminary formation gave me. The feast of Corpus Christi reminds me that I belong to another 'family' that has formed me and shaped me in order to be a priest in this diocese.

This feast reminds us that as a Christian people, we are called to do what Jesus did. There are four key words to what we celebrate and what we do here at the table of life – take, bless, break and give. We take the bread and wine, symbols of life and work, the joys and sorrows of life, we bless the God of creation who gives us gifts in abundance, we break the bread and pour out the wine just as the body of Jesus was broken and his blood poured out for the life of the world, and we give these gifts as food and nourishment for our journey of life and faith. We are called not just to receive Eucharist but to 'become' Eucharist, to become that sacramental presence of Christ for the world, to nourish, to unite and to give hope.

The Church faces an enormous challenge in countries like Australia when more people are having less contact with the word of God and the sacraments celebrated in the local parish community. The sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are there not just for the saintly and the holy but also for the broken, the confused, the uncertain, those who struggle to believe and those who struggle to pray. The Eucharist is not a reward for good behaviour but the sacrament of salvation that transforms our lives and fills us with God's grace. At a time when our homes and supermarkets are filled with food, there is a great hunger in the community as people struggle with mental illness, addiction in various forms, brokenness in families, violence on our streets, the rights of minorities trampled.

The Eucharist nourishes us for mission. The Eucharist should fill our hearts with joy. The Eucharist strengthens our faith even though there are times in life when perhaps we doubt and struggle to pray. When we bring our sorrows and doubts to the table of the Lord, we too are broken and poured out in sacrifice, called to give our lives in service just as Jesus literally poured out the gift of himself in the service of others. Just as the scriptures are like a mirror of our life experience, so too here at the altar, we are drawn into the paschal mystery of Christ, it is reflected back to us in the joys and challenges of life in the bread and wine we share. In faith, we believe that we are transformed just as the bread and wine of the Eucharist become for us the new life of Christ. The Eucharist is food and nourishment for life. We ask the Lord to feed us when we are hungry and in turn for us to nourish the hunger of those around us. Jesus is the Bread of Life; he satisfies our hungry hearts.