

Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

Year A 2017

Many of the prayers made by the people of the Old Testament are centred on reminding God, in case his divine memory is slipping, of the promises he 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. So **their** prayers of intercession are made to jolt God's memory, to play back his promise, to hold him to his word.

But what happens when the people come into plenty ? Do they remain faithful to **their** promises to God when they are in the midst of prosperity, when they are well off ? 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.

If the people do not want God to forget them in their affliction, God does not want the people to forget them in their affluence. So he reminds the people that when they are safely installed in their new homes with the ancient Hebrew equivalent of 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 hauled them through the wilderness when they had **no** baggage but the memory of slavery, and nowhere to go but away from Egypt. If that memory is not kept alive then it will be as if God no longer existed because people are not disposed to remember how he adopted them and cared for them in their need. 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 word of God which brought them the manna – their daily bread – referred to as “the grain of heaven” and “the bread of the mighty.” (Ps 78) The people collected as much as they needed for the day; they were forbidden to hoard any of it. The next day the arrival of the bread was seen as a new sign of God's continuing favour.

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.

It is at the Last Supper that Jesus gives himself away as food and drink to 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.*

Most of us don't have to remember to eat; our stomach has its own way of telling us when it is time. But we do have to remember to eat in the name of Jesus – which is why the Church asks us to gather in community each week to keep the memory of Jesus alive. Our eucharist is a celebration of thanksgiving for what Jesus has done. Lest we forget what he has done, we assemble to hold that memory sacred.

Each of the Eucharistic Prayers expresses the purpose of our gathering - the refusal to forget what Jesus has done 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, we come together as a community to profess that what Jesus did for us has a continuing importance. Today. Our celebration of the eucharist keeps us from being a thankless people.