

First Communion (2)

On a hill near Cape Town, South Africa, just below the famed Table Mountain, a gun is fired every day at noon. The hill is known as Signal Hill. The firing of the gun once served a beautiful purpose. It signalled that a ship, on its way to or from India, had arrived in the harbour with a cargo of goods, and was in need of supplies of food and fresh water. A beautiful exchange resulted. There was receiving and giving.

But that was a long time ago. The purpose no longer exists. Yet the gun is still fired dutifully every day. However, the firing is now little more than an empty ritual. Once it had a beautiful meaning. Now the meaning has gone out of it. Most of the local people ignore it. Visitors are told, "If you hear a loud bang at mid-day, don't worry. It's only the gun going off".

However the ritual still has one thing going for it. Most people know the story behind it. If that story were to be lost, then the ritual would become poorer still.

The Eucharist celebrates a wonderful event. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist we tell that story again. But like anything that is repeated over and over again, there is a danger that it may become just a ritual.

In the Eucharist Jesus nourishes us with the bread of life. But it's not meant to be one-way traffic. Having received from Jesus, we are expected to give something in return – not to him, but to one another. Often the Eucharist doesn't produce the effect it's meant to produce – unselfish giving of self in the service of others.

We keep giving out the bread and the cup. "This is my body, given for you..... This is my blood, poured out for you". Yet very often it seems

to have little effect on people. We don't always see people who pour out their lives in the service of others.

For the Hebrews, remembering was not a mere recalling. It was the making present to each generation of the saving events of the past. In the same way, the Eucharist is no mere making present of Christ's body and blood, but is a proclamation and a memorial of his life-giving death.

The Eucharist is the heart of everything. But it can never be separated from the washing of the feet. The two realities are linked – being in communion with Jesus so that we can be in communion with others.

It would be a pity if the Eucharist became just a ritual, an empty ritual. Jesus gives himself to us here, so that we in our turn may give ourselves to others.

To our young people who are receiving Holy Communion for the first time this weekend and to your parents and families who have helped you prepare for this day – congratulations. May you welcome Jesus into your hearts and return regularly to be strengthened by his word and sacrament in your lives.