

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI ~ 19 June 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

Today Canada celebrates the feast of Corpus Christi while Peru celebrated it on Thursday past, the traditional date. Many see this feast as a leftover tradition from the Middle Ages when most people did not receive Communion regularly but were comforted by seeing and adoring the host in the monstrance. Holy Thursday celebrates the mysteries contained in Scripture that are foundational to our understanding of Eucharist. So, is there any need or purpose in continuing to celebrate Corpus Christi when today we have the privilege of frequently participating in the Eucharist? In one of God's ongoing surprises, our new understandings of social justice and ecology are giving this day new meaning.



Unlike Holy Thursday when other matters of faith coincide with Eucharist – Jesus' words at the Last Supper, his washing of the feet of the disciples, and the beginning moments of his Passion, the feast of Corpus Christi focuses solely on the celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ present among us. The use of bread and wine as signs of that presence is in itself gift. Bread and wine are among the most basic and the most ordinary of all food and drink on Earth. They are the work of God's

hands – the wheat and the grapes – joined with the work of human hands making the bread and the wine. In Pope Francis' words at last year's feast, "Today once more we find the greatness of God in a piece of Bread, in a fragility that overflows with love, overflows with sharing. *Fragility* is precisely the word I would like to underscore. Jesus becomes fragile like the bread that is broken and crumbled. But his strength lies precisely therein, in his fragility. *In the Eucharist, fragility is strength*: the strength of the love that becomes small so it can be welcomed and not feared; the strength of the love that is broken and shared so as to nourish and give life; the strength of the love that is split apart so as to join us in unity."

In the southern highlands of the Cusco Region of Peru, the festival of Quylluriti'i is held near Corpus Christi in the Sinaqara Valley. As many as 10,000 pilgrims come from neighboring areas. Culminating on Trinity Sunday, this festival marks the return in the sky of the brightest stars visible in both northern and southern hemispheres, the Pleiades constellation, known in the Quechua language as Qullqa, or "storehouse," as it is associated with the upcoming harvest and New Year. The festival precedes the official feast of Corpus Christi, held the Thursday following Trinity Sunday, but it is closely associated with it. In this festival, the Indigenous peoples of Peru celebrate the coming together of Earth and heaven in a special way.

We proclaim in today's psalm, "From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you" (Ps 110:3). The 13th century mystic, Angela of Foligno, used this theme of Earth's giving birth



Dancers at Quylluriti'i

when she says, “I beheld and comprehended the whole of creation, that is, what is on this side and what is beyond the sea. . . And my soul in an excess of wonder cried out: ‘This world is pregnant with God!’” In our time, the mystic and theologian, Beatrice Bruteau, echoes this same imaging, “We can stand amazed at the creativity of the world’s expression of its Creator, who has ‘given birth to’ a world which has evolved to the place where it can ‘give birth to’ God.”

How does each person, Earth, and all creation give birth to God? We find some of the answers to this question in the interconnection of food, blessing, sharing, and creation threaded throughout the words of the king and priest Melchizedek of Salem to Abraham as he gives him bread and wine, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19). Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” and the placename “Salem” means “peace.” In Luke’s Gospel account of the food given to the five thousand, blessing and sharing again underline the love of Jesus for the people gathered to listen to him, “And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled” (Lk 11:16-17).



First comes blessing – a sense of naming as holy the food and drink of the meal, naming as holy God’s creation. We echo that affirmation of our food and of all the cosmos as holy each time we bless ourselves and say grace before a meal. As you bless yourself and say grace before your next meal, let it not be simply an automatic gesture but allow yourself to be filled with the holiness of Earth, the holiness of the food you are about to eat, and the holiness of you who are nourished by the food. You, the food, and the Earth are God’s dwelling places. Corpus Christi reminds us that in the sacrament of his most holy body and blood, Christ claims and consecrates us and all of creation as holy.

Last Supper, 12 children from poor areas of Manila and Quezon City in the Philippines, Joey Velasco



In the words of the Jesuit, Tom Elitz, “If we believe that the bread and the wine can truly be transformed into an incarnation of Love, into *Corpus Christi*, then we can have the confidence that we ourselves can be transformed into love incarnate, into sons and daughters of God. That is what the Eucharist does. The bread and wine are transformed, so that *you* can be transformed, so that *we* can be transformed. In our

own transformation into sons and daughters of God, none of us becomes a solo artist. We become part of a choir – a choir that sings love songs to God.”

The effect of the blessing is the strong impulse to share. The meal is itself a shared meal. We use Bruteau’s word to show the diverse ways of sharing – “ordinary food as well as shelter, clothing, medicine, tools; energy, working with/for one another, emotional energies, being supportive; mental goods including news, personal stories, memories, ideas, what makes us feel that we are a community; the sharing of the deep and precious insights and revelations that have shaped our lives; and the sharing of the secret stories of God’s favor to us, “devotion and joy and happiness.”

The sharing of food, explicit in the reading of the Corpus Christi story, means something more in our world of a global environmental crisis and the need to address food shortages and world hunger. In our time, a spiritual writer uses Jesus' words to challenge us to address world hunger:

More than enough food is grown to feed everyone on this planet. *'You give them something to eat.'* Lk 9:13

More than 60,000 people will die of hunger on this feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. Two-thirds of them will be children. *'You give them something to eat.'* Lk 9:13

Nearly one in five people worldwide is chronically malnourished—too hungry to lead a productive, active life. *'You give them something to eat.'* Lk 9:13

One-third of the world's children are significantly underweight for their age. *'You give them something to eat.'* Lk 9:13

The amount of money the world spends on weapons in one minute could feed 2,000 malnourished children for a year. *'You give them something to eat.'* Lk 9:13



Dom Helder Camara, the Brazilian archbishop, socialist and liberation theologian, wrote this prayer to remind us that the food of the Eucharist is for the nourishment of others:

Am I mistaken, Lord, is it a temptation to think
You increasingly urge me to go forth and proclaim
the need and urgency of passing from the Blessed Sacrament
to your other presence, just as real, in the Eucharist of the poor?
Theologians will argue, a thousand distinctions be advanced.
But woe to the person who feeds on You,
and later has no eyes to see you,
to discern You foraging for food among the garbage,
Being evicted every other minute, living in sub-human conditions
under the sign of utter insecurity.

In Paul's account of the Last Supper, repeated in every Eucharistic meal, are Jesus' words, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24). Pope Francis says, "In Mass the death and resurrection of Jesus are set before us. Do this in remembrance of me: come together and celebrate the Eucharist as a community, as a people, as a family, in order to remember me. We cannot do without the Eucharist, for it is God's memorial. And it heals our wounded memory." The remembrance of Jesus, giving birth to God in our world, is found in the blessing and in the sharing.

This coming Tuesday, June 21, is National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada. This is a day for all Canadians to recognize and celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures, and outstanding contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. The Canadian Constitution recognizes these three groups as Indigenous peoples. Although these groups share many similarities, they each have their own distinct heritage, language, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs. In our province, we have five Indigenous communities: the Innu of Labrador, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, the Inuit of NunatuKavut, the Mi'kmaq of Miawpuke (Conne River), and the Qalipu (another Mi'kmaq people).



In cooperation with Indigenous organizations, the Government of Canada chose June 21, the summer solstice, for National Indigenous Peoples Day. For generations, Indigenous peoples and communities have celebrated their culture and heritage on or near this day because of the significance of the summer solstice as the longest day of the year.

Today is another day for memory as we celebrate Father's Day. The only title Jesus uses for God is Father. Joseph was Jesus' father on Earth, a man who influenced the person Jesus became. And so today we remember and give thanks for our own fathers using this prayer from Rev. Abi:

O God, we today pray for Fathers near and far.
We pray for Fathers alive and Fathers who are dead.
We pray for Fathers who were present with their children and those who were absent.
We pray for new Fathers and old Fathers.
We pray for those who loved well and those who did not love as well.
 We pray for Fathers who play(ed) with their children and those who don't.
 We pray for those who take their fathering seriously and those who don't.
 We pray for biological dads and dads who raised us.
 We pray for those who don't get to be dads at all.
We pray for Fathers who were let down by their dads,
We pray for Fathers who were not loved by their fathers.
We pray for Fathers who missed out on the presence of fathers.
We pray for fathers whose fathers did not play with them.
 We pray for Fathers who may be caught up in this recession and lost their jobs.
 We pray for Fathers who serve in the military in far away places and lands.
 We pray for Fathers who may be trapped by addictions.
 We pray for Fathers who are serving in prison away from their children.
 We pray for Fathers who are all wrapped up in their work too busy for their children.
We pray for our fathers. We pray for them to have strength, wisdom and courage.
We pray for them to raise their children in the way that they should go.
We pray for them to love, laugh, play and live.
We pray for forgiveness for our fathers,
for their shortcomings, their weaknesses, and their abuses.
 And God, we pray that we may then be able to pray to you, Abba Daddy. Amen.