

Encouragement

June 2016 – Issue 59

Priesthood and ‘Presence’

At this time there are many discussions, fears and anxieties about the shortage of priests. There are plans to do this and that to prepare and substitute so that we remain faithful people – of course this shortage is not reflected universally and many priests now travel and serve in places that once were mission stations, but now have a superabundance of vocations to priesthood.

Yet while we discuss and bemoan there is a certain lacking in the understanding of both Priesthood and Lay Vocation. Sometimes the two seem in apparent contradiction or dissociated, other times they seem in almost subtle opposition or at least in superimposition where crucially the roles are complementary. However a crucial and vital element of the priestly rôle is either ill –understood, omitted or downplayed and that is the Sacramental role of being the purveyors of The Bread of Life- Jesus. We can have many plans and services performed by lay people but the specific, crucial and supreme function cannot be substituted and therefore without ministerial priesthood we will not have This Life-Giving Bread which is crucial to our spiritual wellbeing.

June is traditionally the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The revelations to St Margaret Mary Alacoque given at a time of heresy (Jansenism) spoke of the love of Jesus for us and tried to turn the tide of a rigorous and punitive view of Christianity. This year we celebrate another dynamic of His love that is His abundant mercy to Man as coming to serve as one of us and leaving Himself to us in the precious Body and Blood. St Faustyna whose full title is ‘of the Blessed Sacrament’, spoke much of this life giving Bread. Mercy and love are complimentary and in some ways identical. At the end of May we have the feast of ‘Corpus Christi’ leading us into the celebration of His Sacred Heart a heart full of love and compassion. What else does this mean to us, when we receive this life giving bread this sacred host? What do we believe and pray- how significant is it to us?

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In this month many children and young people receive Jesus for the first time in this form. How much do we pray for them and assist them as they often today struggle to both understand and believe? If the Eucharist is essential and critical to our faith, to our attendance and participation in Mass how willing are we to learn and pray about what is the transforming power of His presence among us?

There is also the question of reverence and awe. Do we take his presence for granted? Are we willing to be humble in His Presence? Do we practice interior (and exterior) silence letting Him invade our thought and hearts?

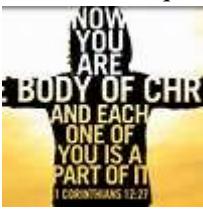
Over the centuries, at various times, lay people have taken the Body of Jesus to others who were sick or imprisoned. We now have extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who promise faithfully to do just that – not as a substitute for Priesthood but an adjunct to enable the sick to be part of the community of faithful and be strengthened by it...

We are blessed that this is still possible and that we have enough priests for daily or weekly Mass to still be celebrated and that we can rejoice in the Presence of the ultimate Host.

But a word of caution and a word of encouragement: In years past it was considered favourable to speak of ‘Spiritual Communion’ when actual reception for a variety of reasons was not possible. In many parts of the world many people do not receive the Body and Blood of Christ. But to those that need Him and desire Him He is always present. It is vital to remember that we too are that Body and we must be for each other. Jesus is never absent. If attendance at Mass is not possible or even attendance at a church then he will make himself present to us in a variety of ways. If we seek Him we will find Him. Surely this is the essence of prayer of the heart.

The following is part of a ‘regular newsletter’ to the members of the Community of Blessed Charles de Foucauld (an Ecclesial Community).

The extract is quoted in full. (*With permission*).



Become “good bread” for humanity, for it is only the bread that we have shared which can satisfy us. Baptised, we are called to be living bread for our brothers and sister. “Become what you receive, become the Body and Blood

of Christ, become other Christs, it is He who said “I am the bread of life”. ‘Flowers before bread’ say the little Brothers of the Poor. I think flowers and bread go well together. It is up to me, who look after the flowers in the place where I live, to be the bread; the bread of true friendship, of a kindly presence, the bread of a warm hand, of a smile, the bread of a word of comfort. That’s what I try to live in my Ehpad retirement home, where frail people wait for little gestures which give them greater courage to live. On my storey, I am in charge of the flowers. It’s a joy to pick them in the garden. My modest arrangements are appreciated by residents and staff. Their warm thanks feed my heart. These are people weakened by disability or great age who became ‘good bread’ for me. Our mutual thanks are a bit like the ‘Mass’ in action. ‘Ita Missa Est’! Yes, the Mass continues. Words and bread exchanged in our daily routine deepen friendship, which then becomes a fraternal communion.

The Eucharist is not only celebrated at the altar, as my experience with my ‘priest brother’ Yves testifies. I was in intensive care, fully wired up, after a brief coma. Yves visited me roughly every other day. I couldn’t speak, but I appreciated his presence, his smile, his few but reassuring words, and his prayers. One day I wanted to express my thoughts to him. On a board I managed to write: ‘The Lord-shepherd -rock-shelter- living water-bread-light-rest-tenderness and compassion- FIAT!’ Yes, *fiat!* This was a great step forward for me, who, to start with, had only one thought: “Why, Lord?” This exchange was like a small Gospel sharing, a mini-liturgy of the Word.

One day our time together was even more special. With great affection and sweetness, Yves took my hand in his, one of the warmest of hands. I felt that the two of us, together, were strongly united with Christ, adoring in the deepest of silences and in great peace. It lasted a long moment. The tubes and wires no longer existed. I felt as if in another world. Was it Heaven already? It was a very strong presence. Real Presence? Eucharist? Certainly an intimate sharing of a bread which was not of this world, in the love of the Lord, and in thanksgiving. In my state, sacramental communion was not possible. But in those precious moments, when I was so weak that the doctors were almost without hope, Yves and I had had a unique experience of communion. Thank you, Yves. Thank you, Lord. Is not the Eucharist a great THANK-YOU?

Despite the doctors’ prognosis I came through. During the weeks and months which followed, I was led to pray at the bedside of people at the end of their lives. I tried to be for them ‘good bread’ murmuring a few ‘Aves’ or bits of well-known hymns and psalms, invoking Our Lady in the way they liked. Their look, and sometimes their smile, tasted like good bread. As did their hands, which did not let go of mine.

The most important thing which happened was, with my ‘brothers and sisters’, to be with our beloved priest brother Yves, who was in palliative care. With him I tried to be the bread which brings comfort, as he had done for me two years earlier. Throughout his priestly life he had experienced the Word and the Eucharist, which he had shared with the People of God. The hour had come for him to hear the final summons, which I murmured to him: “Come, good and faithful servant, enter the joy of your Master”. Deeply mourning, but with the Breton Faith received from our forebears, and a strong hope in Life, we committed Yves into the Hands of the Father on October 9th 2012. At the banquet of the elect I like to imagine him singing with his customary enthusiasm, aglow with the blessed THANK-YOU of a mysterious Eucharist.

Marie-Odile Hervé was a long-time member of the Foucauldian community in this country before returning to her native Brittany. She lives in a retirement home in Rennes.

And thank you Marie-Odile.

Halina Holman

Pope Francis and Communion.

The Eucharist, sanctifies us, purifies us and unites us in a marvellous communion with God. In that way we learn that the Eucharist is not a prize for the good, but strength for the weak; for sinners it is pardon; it is the viaticum that helps us move forward, to walk. Eat this Sacred food, so that your bond of unity with Christ may never be broken. Drink this Sacred Blood, the price he paid for you, so that you may never lose heart because of your sinfulness. Division and losing heart are a danger, a threat, but the gift of Christ’s presence in His Body and Blood give Christians the strength to resist them. But the Eucharist is the bond of communion and the constant sign of the love of Christ who died on the cross so that we would remain united, Christ, present among us under the sign of bread and wine, demands that power of love overcome every fracture and, at the same time, become communion with the poor, support for the weak and fraternal concern for those who struggle to bear the weight of daily life and are in danger of losing their faith.

Rome June 2015

The Pope's Prayer Intentions for June

That seminarians and men and women entering religious life may have mentors who live the joy of the Gospel and prepare them for mission.

Feasts in June

3rd Sacred Heart of Jesus,

4th Immaculate Heart of Mary

4th St. Charles Lwanga and Companions

9th St. Columba,

11th St. Barnabas, Apostle

13th St. Anthony of Padua

22nd Ss. John Fisher and Thomas More

24th Birth of St. John the Baptist

29th Ss. Peter and Paul Holy Day of Obligation

