

Feast of Corpus Christi. 18-6-17. Whoever eats this bread.

Most of you are aware that I have been on holidays over the last four weeks, and while that has included a fair swathe of time relaxing on my own, it also included a good deal of sitting around tables with family or friends sharing a meal, catching up with what's been happening, and telling stories. In many ways this second element of my holidays was the more life-giving, - renewing relationships, deepening friendships, and growing in awareness of each other, and the joys and sorrows which are part of every life.

It is a common experience which relates all of us to the feast we are celebrating today, where Jesus invites us to come and share a meal together with him.

In our large churches, where hundreds of people can be accommodated, the intimacy of this coming around a table doesn't come out as clearly as it should, and that is one reason why during Advent and Lent we have celebrated a number of Home Masses which allow that more intimate experience to take place.

Yet, the other, larger, gathering are necessary too, if we are to be faithful to the meals in which Jesus broke bread with thousands of people. These weren't isolated occasions that had no precedent happening before them. As we learn from the feeding of the 5,000, that many of them had been following Jesus for days, listening to the stories and insights he shared with them. Sure, a good proportion would be there in the hope of a miracle, but they could not help listening, absorbing and discussing what they heard him say, and so grew in familiarity with him and with each other.

And that is still an essential part of our coming together to celebrate Mass or the Eucharist. The readings at Mass, together with the homily, bring us into the company of Jesus, not only in the Gospel,

but in the other readings as well. Remember that when Jesus used Scripture to make a point, he used what we know as the Old Testament. Everything he taught was done within the framework of the Old Testament, its history, its prophecies, and its spirituality. That is how his listeners heard him, and that is how it moved them, even to the extent of wanting to acclaim him as king.

Similarly, in the readings of the New Testament, other than the Gospels, Jesus is present as well, for it is his teaching that forms the foundation of what St. Paul and the other writers share with us.

It is important, therefore, that when, in today's gospel we hear Jesus say: "Whoever eats this bread will live forever", that we don't think only about receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, but that we also listen to him as he shares his thoughts, his teaching, his very approach to life with us.

I wonder what would happen, if after this homily, instead of sitting down quietly for some moments of reflection, or digging into your purses for your contribution to the first collection, you were to turn to each other, and share what you heard Jesus say in and through the readings, - just as the people did who had followed Jesus for days. Would it not help to bring you closer as a community, experience the presence of Jesus among you, and prepare you more fully to receive him in Holy Communion?

One of St. Augustine's favourite saying to his congregation was to assure them that they were the Body of Christ, - We are the Body of Christ, but how can we experience that if we never share that experience with one another, through hearing how Jesus has touched us with his words?