

From High Chair to High Table

'Trip Advisor said it was the best restaurant in Leeds,' they told me as they gave me an invitation to a Sunday lunch in January as a Christmas present. 'We didn't know what to get you so we thought we'd take you out.' Tom, my eldest grandson and his fiancée seemed delighted with their gift as they handed it over on Christmas Eve.

As I waited to be collected yesterday a vivid image of Tom, sitting in his high chair as a toddler, came to me. At four months old he had had to undergo surgery to remove part of his intestine and ever after had to be cajoled into eating. A peaceable and loving little boy, he never wanted to be difficult. He just didn't ever seem to feel hungry. I remember those meal times as a gentle, intimate hour with lots of smiles and chat between us as if he knew all I wanted was for his good as he took small mouthful, ate slowly and tried his best . . . and it could take up to an hour! It always felt like a privilege to wait on him, a sacred moment in a busy day when, unspoken, love was offered and received in a teaspoonful of mashed potato – a graced communion.

'The best restaurant in Leeds' lived up to its reputation in terms of ambience, service and the quality of the food, but that was not the real gift. I felt that same high chair intimacy as the young couple shared their dreams and hopes, talked about their jobs and genuinely wanted to know what I had been up to since retirement and what I wanted for the future. There was a sense of something deep and holy in the joy of the encounter, in their genuine attentiveness. We were in no hurry and the sharing was easy and wholesome. When it was time to leave I expected to be dropped off so that they could have the rest of the afternoon to themselves. But the 'present' was still working its blessing and they came in, stayed for a couple of hours still chatting and seemingly not anxious to get home.

When they left I knew that something very special had happened. The real present was their presence, their 'eucharistic' self-giving and desire to give thanks. Our ordinary human sharing, acceptance and love in those few hours on Sunday afternoon, revealed for me that it is only in such moments that we can experience 'communion'. That same high-chair intimacy was re-enacted around the restaurant table and back at home. Other diners will have merely noticed a little group of three deep in conversation and will not have given it a second thought. Seen through a different lens, I recognised something much more profound. At the heart of our celebration - life experiences shared and heard - opened up a new awareness of the holiness at the heart of all life.

Margaret