

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 8th May – The Hungry Heart

People grow in faith through their experiences – and our experiences belong to the senses. Bread, wine and flesh are very earthly words. They are carnal and physical. There is nothing ethereal or other-worldly about them. Yet wonderfully, these are precisely the substances and realities that God has become – first in creation, then in Jesus, and now in the Eucharist. In *The Great Hunger* Patrick Kavanagh wrote that 'in a crumb of bread the whole mystery is'. The utter humanising of God in flesh, bread and wine sounds shocking. No other religion talks about its God in this incarnational and Eucharistic way. We are not saved by religions, doctrines, scriptures, pilgrimages and rituals. God comes to feed us – people of the flesh – in the earthly and unique intimacy of food. And we do not just look at it and adore it. We touch, eat and drink it. The mass is Incarnation in miniature. Divine love takes the intimate shape of our essential, sensual and rawest selves. When we sit at the table of truth, immediately after receiving Holy Communion, we hear the vital assurance: 'I am now the living food of your flesh. I am the vibrant wine of your energy, the power within you. In me you are made complete, and you are invincible even in your darkest winter. And when your heart is full, it will overflow into the hearts of the hungry, bringing peace and hope.'

In his 'We awaken in Christ's Body' St Symeon, the new Theologian, reflects on the miracle of Communion:

... and everything that is hurt,
everything that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,
maimed, ugly, irreparably
damaged, is in Him transformed
and recognized as whole, as lovely,
and radiant in His light,
we awaken as the Beloved
in every last part of our body.

These infinitely intimate experiences of our sacred senses are central to the meaning of the Year of Mercy. They purify and confirm our graced potential for recognising God's bread in every bread, God's incarnate body in every human body, God's own need in every need. And we do not just receive the holy bread; Pope John Paul II reminded us in *Ecclesia Eucharistia* - we become it. And we become it not just for ourselves – as Pope Francis preached; we become it for the compassionate service of others. What is most personal is most universal. We become it to light the way for others. 'Dear God', wrote Blessed John Henry Newman, 'help me to spread your beauty everywhere I go today. Flood my soul with your spirit and light. Fill my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of you.'

(*Treasured and Transformed* p19, 20)