

## Daniel's reflection for week-beginning 29th August – The Hungry Heart

People grow in faith through their experiences-and our experiences belong to the flesh. Think then for instance, of your own favourite daily bread-the touch of it, the smell of it, the taste of it. Think of real red wine, your favourite wine, swirling it, sniffing it, and savouring it. Think of the human body, your own beloved body and that of others, and all the sensations that your body brings you.

Bread, wine and flesh are very earthy words. They are carnal and physical. There is nothing serial or otherworldly 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 talked about it's God in this incarnational and Eucharistic way. We are not saved by doctrines, Scriptures, religions, pilgrimages and rituals. God comes to feed us-people of flesh-in the earthy and unique intimacy of food. And we do not just look at it and adore it. We eat and drink and touch it.

Divine love takes the shape of the very stuff about essential, sensual and rawest selves. Or rather it reveals that this was always its chosen shape. Some were deeply hidden within us we have always known that – the real name of our True Self. But, because we congenitally forget our astonishing identity, we need constant, profound and sensual reminding of it.

The mass is incarnation in miniature. And when we sit at the table of truth, immediately after receiving Holy Communion, we hear the astonishing reassurance: 'I am now the living food of your flesh. I am the vibrant one of your energy, the power within you. In me you are made complete, and you are invincible even in your darkest winter. My divinity has become flesh of your flesh, love of your love. And when your heart is full, it will overflow into the heart 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 in us, everything that seems to us dark, harsh, shameful, maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged, is in Him transformed and recognised as whole, as lovely, and radiant in His light, we awaken at the Beloved in every last part of our body.'

Those infinitely intimate experiences of our sacred senses of central to our experience of God. They purify and confirm our greatest potential for recognising God's bread in every bread, God's incarnate body in every human body, God's need in every need. And we do not just receive the holy bread, Pope John Paul reminded us in Ecclesia Eucharistia, we become it.

And we become it not just for ourselves-we become it for compassionate service of others.

What is most personal is most universal. We become it to light the way for others. 'Dear God,' said St John Henry Newman, 'help me to spread your beauty everywhere I go today.'

That is why nothing or nobody has the power to stop us from receiving holy communion- once we hunger for it. Countless Catholics, for one reason or another, consider themselves unworthy to receive a mass. Or they are told they are. But the gospels tell them a different story-that God is the freely offered food for everyone without exception; all we have to do is provide the hunger. 'Christ is the bread,' wrote Saint Augustine, 'awaiting hunger.'

When we make the Eucharistic meal into anything else, something for example to define membership, we are on the verge of sinning against the Incarnation. 'Too often we use the Eucharist to separate who's in from who's out,' writes Richard Rohr, 'who's worthy from who's unworthy, instead of to declare that all of us are radically unworthy, and that worthiness is not even the issue. The issue is about surrender and hunger. And more often, surrendered sinners are much more hungry than "saints".'

We are all, in fact, forgiven sinners, hungry daughters and sons of a mother-God who embraces us, nourishes us, gathers around her open table of divine/human love, and then, delightfully, offers herself to every one of us without exception. God's extraordinary desire for us has never ever, because of a fall-original or personal - dimmed or faded in the intensity of its burning. It is in the ordinariness, accessibility and blessing of bread that this ravishing love incarnate is experienced and celebrated. And it is the sacramentality of the celebration that reveals the most comforting truth- in all our daily efforts to be human and loving, Eucharistic grace is always surrounding us, unfolding us, empowering and consecrating us.

RS Thomas ended his poem the more with these sublime words;

*'... I walked on,  
simple and poor, while the air crumbled  
and broke on me generously as bread.'*

(From an article written for the Year of Faith)