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THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST—C (Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110; 1 Cor 11:23—26; Lk 9:11-17)

Noted spiritual theologian Ron Rolheiser OMI recounts how a distraught young man accosted him in the sacristy after mass one Sunday. He had preached on the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan; how the Father had blessed Jesus on that occasion, and on the importance of parents blessing their children.

The young man told Fr. Ron that he hated his homily and the whole celebration; that he was being sentenced the next day in court; that he had come to mass to somehow strengthen himself for that ordeal, and that he had never been blessed by anybody, nor seen as good by anyone, least of all his father – thus his lack of appreciation for the liturgy he had just experienced.

Recently, a teacher shared with me how so many of the children at his school seemed to be yearning for a hug or some mark of affection from him. This made him wonder what was going on in their homes – why was there this tremendous need for that attention from a teacher?

Both these situations underline an acute social phenomenon in our modern society – a father hunger, and a hunger for love. Mother Theresa of Calcutta went so far as to say that the truly poor were not in India; they were in North America where a generation of youth are starved for genuine acceptance, affirmation, validation, affection – in short – love and blessings from their parents.

That hunger can be articulated as the unmet needs that taint the lives of so many today – the need to be loved, to belong, and to be valued. One spiritual writer would express it as the need for love, belonging and connectedness. When these are missing, youth grow up with a devastating lack of security, which spins off into a multitude of painful emotions, negative attitudes, and ultimately, addiction as they succumb to the attraction of false gods of possession, prestige and power.

The feast of the Body and Blood of Christ today addresses this issue. We are invited to believe in Jesus as the most complete answer to that hunger, as well as mandated to respond to that hunger as a church, the Body of Christ.

The first reading provides the context for this message. Melchizedek, a mysterious personage, king and priest of God, blesses Abram with gifts of bread and wine to cel-

celebrate his victory over his enemies. The psalm informs us that the Father (Lord) has sent Jesus (the risen Lord in the line of Melchizedek) to overcome all evil and reign over all creation.

In the second reading to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us how Jesus instituted the Eucharist; how as both Lord and High Priest, the gifts of bread and wine he took, blessed, broke and shared were transformed into his Body and Blood for the forgiveness, healing and nourishment of the world. We are to do this in his memory, and when we do, we enter into vigil, into waiting for Jesus to come again in the fullness of his glory, when all his enemies have been “delivered into his hand” as we read in the first reading.

The Liturgy of the Word plunges us into the heart of the gospel, where much is at play. First, Jesus is speaking to the crowds about the Kingdom of God, and healing those who are ill. This is a microcosm of the Eucharist: Jesus’ teaching is the Liturgy of the Word, and Jesus healing is the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We also learn that this miracle of the loaves, and by extension, the miracle of the Eucharist, is central to the Kingdom of God.

The people are hungry, symbolic of that existential hunger for love in our world today. There is great irony in the disciples’ attempt to send the people away. They do not realize that they are in the presence of the Bread of Life, and when Jesus is present, there is no need to go anywhere else. As Peter would later say, “To whom shall we go?” That is the right question, and the right answer within the question.

Then Jesus gives them (and us as his Body the Church) a direct command and mandate – “You give them something to eat!” The meagre resources they bring forth (five loaves and two fish) suggest that when we place our faith in Jesus (as they did by their humble obedience in sitting the people), Jesus multiplies our limited resources and works marvels through them.

Many is the pastoral worker or clergy person who has realized with awe that a change or healing that happened in a person to whom they were ministering was brought about not by their ministry, but by the Holy Spirit working through their humble efforts.

The fact that there were twelve baskets of fragments left over has a double connotation. Not only is Jesus the one who can more than fulfill our deepest human needs, he is also the Messiah who has come to fulfill the deepest aspirations of the Jewish religion and nation, if they would only accept him.

What we are left with, as a worshipping community of disciples of Jesus, is his mandate – “You give them something to eat.” We are mandated to be Jesus for the world, to be bread of life for the world, to pour out on this wounded and hungry world the love that Jesus has for it. Once again, Mother Theresa of Calcutta set the tone when she exclaimed – send me your unwanted and unloved youth; send me the children that you do not want to bring into the world, and I will love them and take care of them!

The outpouring of caring, generosity and compassion of the nation towards the evacuees from the Fort McMurray wildfire recently is an example of what we are capable of as a nation. Can we spread that caring and compassion to those less respectable and less socially acceptable, such as the homeless in our cities?

The men's and women's wellness retreats held at the Star of the North Retreat Center in St. Albert, Alberta each spring for inner city residents who are struggling with poverty, mental issues, addictions and alienation is an example of that kind of love that Jesus is asking of us as his disciples. Funds are raised and teams come together to offer the best of their resources to give these wounded men and women a healing experience of being loved and cared for.

The Eucharist is in its own way a re-enactment of the ministry of Jesus described at the outset of this gospel – teaching and healing. We are nourished by his Word, and healed by receiving his Body and Blood.

May our celebration empower us to live out the Eucharistic mandate he has given us – to be the bread of life for the world.

Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI

GOD'S SENSE OF HUMOR

There are still people everywhere who believe there's no longer any issue regarding the status of women. Widespread is the belief that today, at least in democratic countries, women enjoy full equality with men. As well, for many, feminism is a bad word, politically charged, representing a radical liberal ideology whose agenda is at odds with traditional family values. What's to be said about this?

First off, feminism, like Christianity, is a wide term that includes both healthy and strident expressions. There are good feminists and there are strident ones, as is true too of Christians. Be that as it may, my main purpose here is to suggest that nothing can be further from the truth than the naïve belief that gender equality has been achieved - anywhere. It hasn't, not by a long shot.

Why do I say this? Before offering more substantial evidence, let me highlight just one example. I live in the West, in the United States, in America, in Texas, in San Antonio (a very Christian and compassionate city), in a democratic culture that prides itself and believes itself to be a beacon to the world vis-à-vis human rights and women's equality. Yet, as I read our daily newspaper, rarely does a single week go by wherein there isn't the report of a woman dying because of domestic violence. Moreover, these are only reports of women being murdered by a domestic partner; the numbers are no doubt astronomically higher in terms of women suffering physical and sexual abuse in our homes. Note, in 90% of these cases it's the woman who dies.

However, to substantiate the claim that women still suffer, massively and disproportionately, from inequality, let me cite a series of comments from a recent book Awak-

ening, by Joan Chittister:

“The fact is that two-thirds of the poor of the world are women, two-thirds of the illiterate of the world are women and two-thirds of the hungry of the world are women. Oppression of half the human race cannot be explained by accident. ... Women are most of the poor, most of the refugees, most of the uneducated, most of the beaten and most of the rejected of the world.”

“The history of women is one of historical and universal oppression, discrimination and violence. In Buddhism, women who have led lives of total spiritual dedication are trained to take orders from the youngest of the male monks. In Islam, women are required to veil their heads and cover their bodies to express their unworthiness and signal the fact that they belong to some man. In Hinduism, women are abandoned by their husbands for higher pursuits and larger dowries or held responsible for his death by virtue of a woman’s bad karma. In most forms of Judaism, women are denied access to religious ritual and education. In Christianity, until recently and in many sectors yet, the legal rights of women have been equated with those of minor children; wife-beating is protected by domestic right and even the spiritual life of women is dictated, directed, and controlled by the men of the faith.”

Moreover, Chittister highlights an irony that generally goes unrecognized and, worse still, is often used to camouflage our failure to accord women equal status. Here’s the irony. Many of us nurture, consciously or unconsciously, an attitude that might aptly

be called a romantic feminism wherein we over-idealize and over-exalt women and, ironically but understandably, by that very token end up denying them full equality. This is how Chittister puts it: “on no other class, surely has so much poetry, so much music, so many flowers, so much adulation, so much tolerance, so much romantic love and so little moral and intellectual, spiritual and human respect been lavished.” In essence, an over-idealization of women, tells them: you’re so special and wonderful that you shouldn’t be treated in same way as men!



In essence, an over-idealization of women, tells them: you’re so special and wonderful that you shouldn’t be treated in same way as men!

I’m old enough to have lived through a couple of generations of feminism. In the 1980s and 1990s, when I taught theology in a couple of universities, feminism, both healthy and strident, was very strong within the faculty and in much of the student body. I confess that I wasn’t always at ease with it, particularly with its often-militant tone. I sensed its legitimacy, even as I feared its stridency .

Well, times have changed. Today, in the classrooms I teach, more and more, I’m meeting women, younger women, who have little sympathy or use for the feminism of the 1980s and 1990s. There’s almost a patronizing attitude towards those women

who pioneered the feminist agenda. Partly, it's a generational thing that's understandable. Partly, however, it's also a naiveté, an unfounded belief that the battle has been won, that women have now achieved full equality, that there's no need any longer for the old-style battles.

So, when I read Chittister's grim statistics and read about domestic violence almost daily in our newspapers, I long for those feisty feminists I once met in classrooms and at faculty meetings all those years ago

Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas

“YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT” (Luke 9:23a)

When we reflect on the idea of vocation, our immediate response might be somewhat akin to that of the disciples in today's Gospel passage. Faced with the hungry crowd, their initial response was one of inadequacy. Their solution was for Jesus to send the crowd away so that the people could get lodging and provisions. Jesus' response was for the disciples simply to give everything they had, and it turned out to be enough.

As disciples, Jesus calls us to respond to the needs of our community, particularly of those whose lives cry out for freedom from oppression, poverty, racism and every other condition that prevents them from being fully the people God created them to be. Faced with the vastness of the task, we can either respond out of our feelings of inadequacy and turn away from the call, or we can hear Jesus' invitation to give everything we have and trust that it will be enough.

This willingness to give everything we have and trust that it will be enough is at the heart of understanding the meaning of vocation. God calls each one of us in a general way as well as in a particular way. First of all, we are called into relationship with God and one another within the community of faith, gathered around the table of the Eucharist. This in our primary or general vocation. Within the vocation to be a disciple of Jesus, each one of us is also called to a particular vocation; married, single, religious, cleric, parent, teacher, mechanic, etc. No matter what our particular vocation, we are called to respond to the needs of others, to make Christ present in our world and continue to build the kingdom. Faced with the particular call from God, we are invited to trust that if we respond, if we give everything we have, it will be enough, and more than enough. God doesn't call us to the impossible, but to the possible, given the particular gifts and graces each of us has been given.

Reflecting on the gospel passage, perhaps the experience of feeding the crowd was what give the disciples the courage and faith to respond to their call to proclaim the Good News to the whole world. As we look to their example, we now are called to continue to proclaim and be the Good News to others.



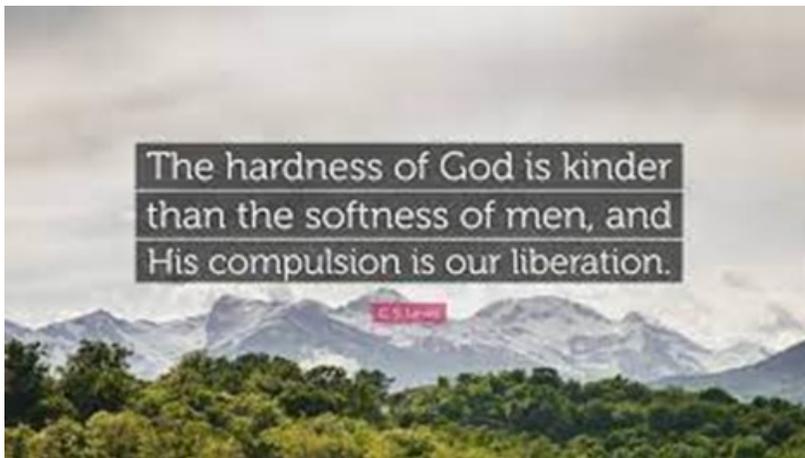
Richard Beaudette, OMI

CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES

In describing his own conversion, C.S. Lewis shares how he didn't want to become a Christian but something inside of him told him that he **had** to become one.

Calling himself "the most reluctant convert in the history of Christendom", at a point in his life, Lewis came to realize "that God's compulsion" was his liberation. He became a Christian because, paradoxically, in a moment of genuine freedom, he came to know he had no other choice existentially except to surrender himself to something, God's compulsion, which presented itself to him as an obligation.

"God's compulsion" is precisely a deep and authentic 'should' inside us, and the great paradox is that when we submit to it, we become freer and more mature. It's also what brings joy into our lives. It's no accident that the book in which Lewis describes this experience is called "Surprised by Joy".



There's a great paradox at the heart of life that's hard to accept, namely, that freedom lies in obedience, maturity lies in surrender, and joy lies in accepting duty and obligation. Jesus clearly taught and embodied this paradox: He was the freest human person to ever walk this planet, yet he insisted constantly that he did nothing on his own, that everything he did was in obedience to his Fa-

ther. He was the paradigm of human maturity, even as his life was one within which he habitually surrendered his own will. And he was free of all false religion, false morality, and false guilt, even as he constantly drew upon moral and religious imperatives deep inside of his own soul and inside of his own religious tradition.

Simone Weil was an extraordinary philosopher and mystic who guarded her freedom so deeply that, despite her belief in the truth of Christ, she resisted baptism because she wasn't sure that the visible church on earth merited this kind of trust. Despite her fierce instinctual resistance, what she ultimately wanted and needed was to be obedient.

Weil once stated that we spend our whole lives searching for someone or something to be obedient to because unless we give ourselves over in obedience to something greater than ourselves, we inflate and grow silly – even to ourselves. She's right.

Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas

READINGS FOR BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST SUNDAY

FIRST READING

A reading from the Book of Genesis (Genesis 14.18-20)

In those days: After Abram's return King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed Abram and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him one tenth of everything.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Psalm 110)

Response: You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Lord says to my lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." R.

The Lord sends out from Zion your mighty sceptre. Rule in the midst of your foes. R.

Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you. R.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest for-ever according to the order of Mechizedek." R.

SECOND READING

A reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11.23-26)

Brothers and sisters: I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my Body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my Blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Thanks be to God

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Alleluia.

I am the living bread of heaven, says the Lord; whoever eats of this bread will live forever.

Alleluia.

GOSPEL READING

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke (Luke 9.11b-17)

Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.”

But Jesus said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish — unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men.

And Jesus said to his disciples, “Make the people sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did so and made them all sit down.

And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

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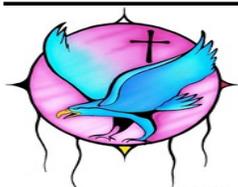
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