

We are beginning to circle around the meaning of the eucharist. On one side of my desk, as I think I've said before, I have an article entitled 'What are you doing up there?' which can be read in many different ways, and on the other side of my desk, at the moment, two books detailing the lives of people at completely contrasting poles of English society: *The Making of the English Working Class* and the story of the Mitford sisters; the one set, leading a very oppressed sort of life and struggling for greater freedom and the other leading a life essentially seeking pleasure and the exercise of power – or that's how it comes across to me so far. Now, I'm reading them to be informed -the Mitford interest being partly a local one as they were first cousins of the Farrer family who live just across the road from here at Cold Brayfield, and the other, to get at least the beginnings of an idea why our present society is so obviously divided and becoming more so. And interestingly I find that both books leave me, essentially, 'cold'; there's an element in them of something essentially missing and I'm reminded, especially as it was his feast day yesterday, of a similar experience of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, who was gradually weaned off reading books on famous people to books on holy living, beginning with the life of Christ, the former leaving him 'dejected and empty' and the latter filled with a joy that continued; the former one might say leaving him 'dispirited' and the latter 'enlivened', and I think this is what Jesus is toying with as he confronts this crowd, after him for further material signs. He's touching on our essential meaning as human beings: what are we doing here? whether as priest or laity. What is going on in this eucharist? And I'm putting it like that as it gives the eucharist a far wider frame of reference than we are often, or have become, accustomed to.

It's not about waving a Catholic or, indeed, a Christian flag, or a way of topping up our store of grace, or even as a means of getting into heaven, or a chance to exercise and demonstrate community. It's rather an acknowledgement that, in this man, Christ, God reveals to us our true meaning as human beings, with depths far beyond, but always mediated through, material reality. We have a hunger in us which both material richness and material poverty can obscure – thinking that gaining or keeping material wealth will be enough to make us happy, to be fulfilled, when there's another dimension which is crying out for fulfilment but, like the crowd in today's gospel scene, is just not there or not yet realised and can be equally obscured by regular attendance at the eucharist and all sorts of arguments over the true presence etc. In other words, we can approach it yet again for an essentially material meaning when what is on offer is essentially an acknowledgement that we are creatures of God: that we cannot be who we are unless we explore this dimension and that it is in and through Christ that this dimension is fulfilled and in a way that is total. When Jesus goes on to say, 'I am the bread of life,' he is not only telling us who *he* is - a divine source of nourishment – but he is also telling us who *we* are: made by God for God, otherwise dead, cold and, ironically, immaterial.

Or in more prescriptive terms, as we heard in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

*'You must give up your old way of life; you must put aside your old self, which gets corrupted by following illusory desires. Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God's way, in the goodness and holiness of truth.'*

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