

One can't be more in touch with one's humanity and the humanity of others than when one touches or is in touch with one's flesh and blood. There – I've already used it in two senses – in the sense of one's own bodily existence with all its aches and pains and strange goings-on, and in the sense of one's own kith and kin, those closest to us by blood relationship – flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone if children, and so on. It's the sort of language that demagogues use to distance their own race from others – these people are not of our flesh, and it quickly spills over into the violent imagery of spilling their blood, of war and all its tempests. But Jesus uses it in quite another way – it's not the language of division but of unity, his unity with us as a human being – it's incarnational speech. I am of your flesh and my flesh will be given, indeed is given, as flesh for the life of the world but, dare I say, to moderate this he also uses the language of hospitality. I am your bread. Come to my table and eat. Share this bread which is a recognition of you as kith and kin with me. One bread, one body – and there we have both language games together without any qualification except the word "One" – the concept of unity and, dare one say again the reality of unity which this brings about. When we eat with one another something very fundamental is not only being said but is taking place – we feed the flesh in order to feed the body but the body we feed is not only our own but that of our neighbour; something new is being created than existed before. We come away changed – no longer the people we were before. Our existence, our life, has been enlarged. This is true of any meal given and received with goodwill, with love – which brings yet another language game, a word even more difficult to pin down but one we all intrinsically recognise, or at least are meant to. I'm thinking of the Alzheimer patient who cannot express it but knows the difference still between being handled kindly, or unkindly, with kinship or inhumanity. So something is going on in this meal which touches us to the core, something of the flesh which is also something of the divine – that is of the world of meaning which incarnation also puts us in touch with. For Jesus is not only of our flesh but of the flesh of his Father – and see how flesh is once again being used in that larger sense

*"As I who am sent by the living Father Myself draw life from the Father So whoever eats me will draw life from me."*

This is God made available to us all. But it's costly. Jesus brings life but at the cost of his own life. And this meaning pertains to our participation too for it incorporates us into a life of self-giving. We are no longer here for ourselves only. We are kith and kin with one another and all flesh has meaning for us. It always had but we need the life of God to tell us this, to teach us that, far from being a source of division, it's through our flesh that we become one with others. We are being schooled in holiness.

*"To the fool she says, come and eat my bread, drink the wine I have prepared. Leave your folly and you will live, walk in the ways of perception."*

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