

Sunday 10A. 7.6.26

Think carefully now of our own meals and that even Judas was allowed to be present at the Last Supper – a meal together is where we both reveal ourselves at our most human – at our most civilised – and where we fracture, where we are at odds with each other to the point of betrayal. This is no less true of the Eucharist than any other meal, which of course it should be if it is that same place of tension, of the meeting of opposites, of the reconciliation of difference that is at the heart of our faith in Jesus as the one who overcomes this necessary division and reveals and restores instead our necessary unity both with each other, within each other and with God.

Already there is a temptation to clericalise this, to go down the road of theological speak, to preserve the power of its explanation to priests, to preserve the distinction between Pharisees and sinners, all those other people out there who are lesser mortals and rely on us alone to be holy, to show and teach them the way of holiness. The last thing we want is a tax collector doing the job for us, or an unknown Galilean upstart. Jesus reacts very strongly to this because he understands that we are all sinners and there can be no distinction between priests and people in this respect.

Pope Leo is visiting Spain at this moment and there was a stark figure given in yesterday's news of over 200,000 children or young people being victims of clerical abuse since, I think, the 1960's in Spain alone. Such figures are difficult to comprehend knowing now that the effect on each victim is a life sentence and cannot be undone. It destroys people for life. Yesterday we were trying in a very small way to redress the balance by formally opening and blessing the Healing Garden at Northampton's Catholic Cathedral. It was a well-organised and well-attended event and accompanied by food and music, a meal again at which we could at least begin to recover some of our original unity but the telling fact for me was that the real healing will take place in a garden, alone where the rest of this beautiful universe can have it's say, where words and gestures of a clerical elite will only get in the way; the harm that has been done is too great. And I thought of Jesus on the cross largely without words now giving himself as victim in reparation for all those past and future victims of clerical betrayal, a victim of that sin of separation which the Pharisees are so blind to in today's gospel passage and which we perpetuate when we remove the Eucharist from it's original setting as the place where fear can be transformed into love -not then a way of distinguishing one set of people from another but of recognising our shared need of one another as sinners before God. Jesus knows full well that Judas will betray him but takes the risk of eating with sinners – that is, with all of us. It's a sacrifice interpreted by love- so when we hear that God wants mercy not sacrifice we need to hear that the priority is love not sacrifice in the sense that no ritual sacrifice can ever undo the harm that has been done by sin, but the smallest loving gesture the act of inclusion which we all need is where we are all called to begin. Where it goes then will not be for us to determine but you can be sure it will meet opposition somewhere.

Br John Mayhead

Monastery of Christ Our Saviour