

TRINITY 9

Fr Peter certainly prepared us well for today's Gospel by telling us, last week, that it was on its way! And, coincidentally, visiting my Mum in Eastbourne last week, she showed me a new book she was enjoying about Sunday school teachers – and I opened it somewhere in the middle and, you guessed it, it was about the 'Feeding of the 5,000'. It was a true story about a 5 year old boy's response to listening and really hearing what he felt to be the main message of that story and miracle. His parents noticed that he had started saving up over several weeks and counting his pennies (do you remember those days?)...and they asked him why. He said very matter of fact: 'I want to buy 5 barley loaves and 2 fish'... so that Jesus can feed the world!

That made me think deeply about what I might say to you today and again, coincidentally, I 'borrowed' a page from my Mum's August copy of 'The Oldie'. It was in that 'God' column by a 'Sister Teresa' and I quote from the second half:

"As guest sister of the monastery, I am responsible for greeting people from all walks of life, and for seeing to their comforts. I am 78 and fairly obviously lame - therefore carrying a tray of food is hazardous both for me and for the food. Getting to our guest cottage involves going down a short but slippery open-air staircase and walking along an uneven garden path to reach the glass door of the guest's kitchen.

We have just had three very distinguished men to stay. The first remained seated while I opened the door and put the lunch tray on the table; the second got up and opened the door for me so that I could put the lunch tray on the table; the

third, an 82 year-old Jesuit, sprinted across the garden path and up the stairs and took the tray from me while I was still on the first step.

I congratulated him on his courtesy and asked where his impeccable manners came from - was it the Jesuits or his mother?

He burst out laughing and said, 'Oh no, not the Jesuits! It was my mother.'

The links between good manners, charity and service are obvious. It is these qualities that make us fully human. Courtesy is an intrinsic part of Jesus's behaviour: he invites without ranting or shouting.

Paul confirms this essential attitude in 1 Corinthians 13:4 'Love is never rude.'"

I am thinking of the star of today's Gospel who not only brought everything he had, the food of miracles, he brought such innocent trust and love and belief in the Lord who clearly brought crowds of attention around him. Was this young boy coerced or simply encouraged by St Andrew? Or, and this is really worth our time for prayer and meditation, was this child like that compassionate and attentive Jesuit, showing us the best way to behave and respond to the Incarnate God in his midst. Did this child instinctively know that this Jesus was a teacher worth listening to as well as looking up to? I feel sure this is not a question you will find in any recommended biblical commentary. But it is my question to you, to consider and respond to.

Out of the mouths of babes....we can not only listen and learn but 'use' in the same way that I have used two different

quotations from a book I have never read and a periodical that I clearly have! For the guest sister, she says delightfully tongue in cheek, “‘carrying a tray of food is hazardous both for me and for the food’”. What could we say on behalf of the anonymous young boy whose offering of food turned into a Feast of Olympic proportions, so much so that 12 baskets of food were left over when the crowds went home? Did he say, at the outset, ‘that’s mine, hands off’ or, did he say instead, ‘It is all yours, please sir’ – ‘Can **this** help you feed everyone?’

It is as if St Paul, too, has learnt something that we always need to remember, ‘Love is never rude’ or something else he similarly spoke of as a prayer in our Epistle reading today:

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”

Imagine for a moment that sheer sense of scale and happiness of that crowd-full of fed, replete people. Today’s Gospel is surely a foretaste of the banquet of heaven where everything brought there, is eternally shared, enjoyed and fulfilled.