

HOMILY SUNDAY 20 - B (Homily 02)*

“Making Love Real”

(Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58)

For some reason, praying over today’s gospel brought back to mind youthful memories of my mother’s freshly baked, home-made bread.

My siblings and I would return from attending the one-room Whitecap school located in the hamlet of Highgate Siding, three and a half miles away from our family farm. The smell of fresh bread permeated the air as soon as we walked into the house. Gleaming loaves of fresh bread on the cupboard would greet our eyes as the aroma assailed our senses. We would put home-made butter on a slice of that bread and enjoy a taste of heaven.

As I reflect on that experience today, I realize that there was much more involved than just eating bread. At a deeper level, that experience was loaded with feelings of love and security from mom’s constant presence and baking skills, as well as dad’s hard work to provide for us.

There was also the background awareness of the miracle of transformation that had taken place as flour, water and yeast were mixed and baked at high temperatures to produce the golden loaves of fresh bread for our enjoyment and nourishment. It all spoke of home, family, well-being – in a word, God’s love for us taking flesh through human caring and sharing around home-made bread.

No wonder that in today’s Gospel, we are called to believe in Jesus as Son of God, the one from heaven, who comes as bread from heaven. We are invited to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The manna was miraculous food in the desert which sustained the Israelites only physically and materially. Though it came from heaven, it was food only for the body. The Eucharist is food for the soul and the spirit. The Church invites us to participate fully and actively in the liturgical action of eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Jesus, not just to an intellectual faith.

In the second reading, St. Paul invites us to appropriate that faith by living in the Spirit of Jesus, by being filled with his Spirit. We are to act wisely and to do God’s will everyday of our lives. We are to praise God with music and song. We are to give thanks to God through Jesus Christ. We are to put flesh to our belief in God’s love for us in the Eucharist.

There is a strong connection with the Eucharist here because the most pleasing worship we can offer to the Father is the Eucharist. The reason for this is because in the Eucharist we offer back to God what is most pleasing to God, the perfect life and sacrifice of Jesus his Son. All other forms of worship (preaching, altar calls, singing, praying, are good but inferior to the Eucharist). In the Eucharist we give back to God what God has first given

to us. Then in communion, God gives that gift back to us again, a gift that has truly been given twice.

In a recent article in the *Prairie Messenger*, spiritual writer Ron Rolheiser, OMI explains that aspect of sacrifice as the giving of a gift twice. When we receive an awesome gift from another that far surpasses what we think a gift should be, he explains, our natural reaction is to protest, to say that we don't really deserve such a gift. The one who is offering the gift then insists that we take it, that he or she really wants us to have it. In a sense, they give the gift to us twice. That being done, we are set free to really enjoy that gift without any hesitation or lingering feelings of guilt. It is truly ours, as it has been given to us twice, twice-given, which is the true meaning of sacrifice. That is the sense in which the Eucharist is gift to us, twice-given.

That gift calls us to respond, however. As Jesus in the end expressed his love through the Last Supper, a love that would be physically lived out the next day on the cross, so too our faith in God's love for us must also be expressed Eucharistically. It must be lived out in our love for one another.

Jean Vanier, in his book *Becoming Human*, describes seven practical loving actions that can help people move away from chaos towards healing and peaceful order in their lives, to practically live out the Eucharist in their lives. Those seven ways are: to reveal, to understand, to communicate, to celebrate, to empower, to be in communion and to forgive.

For Vanier, a truly loving life seeks to reveal to others their true inner beauty. It seeks to love by understanding the other's inner motives. It includes communicating by naming reality for what it is and speaking out of that truth. It calls us to celebrate the personhood of each one and to affirm their potential. It means building up relationships where there is a communion or mutual interchange of caring and sharing, and above all it includes the readiness to let go of any resentment through forgiveness and to seek to make amends for one's own hurtful actions, all in the context of prayer that unites all in a common vision.

The wisdom that Vanier shares with others through his writing, flows from his experience of living out the Eucharist in community with the poor and the marginalized. It is a wisdom that reflects that of Proverbs in the first reading, calling us to a mature faith that is life-giving and full of insight, also symbolized by a meal, a Wisdom meal.

The Eucharist that we celebrate is our Wisdom meal and a call to mature, loving action. We receive God's love personally, communally and sacramentally and are then missioned to live that love out in practical ways.

Let us then be part of God's wisdom in creating a Eucharistic people who are bread for the life of the world, building up the reign of God here on earth through our faith in God's love for us and through our acts of love for all others and all of God's creation.