

TALK Puy de Serre 9th August 2015 Holy Communion
John 6:35, 41-51 *Ephesians 4:25 to 5:2* *1 Kings 19: 4-8* 'Building one another up.'

As a youngster, I was a newspaper lad, and spent an hour each morning and evening delivering papers in the streets where I lived. Near my patch was Rea's Ice Cream Parlour, and occasionally, after my round I'd treat myself to a cornet there. The café was owned and run by a popular, Italian family and renowned for its home-made ice-cream..

However, when, in later years, son Chris Rea became an international pop-star, I was not alone in wondering how he'd managed to do so, starting from the little park-side café and attending a local school, in a town which, at that time, was seen as a cultural desert.

Aren't we all a little sceptical about 'the local lad, or lass, made good'? How much more so if they start challenging our own thinking, or lifestyle!

Today's Gospel reading begins with Jesus saying, 'I am the Bread of Life, and whoever comes to me will never be hungry;'. Unfortunately, rather than seeking to understand more about what this meant, the local people start muttering, 'Who does he think he is? Isn't this the man who lived down the road and who we've all watched grow up? We know his parents, so what's all this about him being Bread from heaven?'

I'm sure we can all identify with these reactions. God has always worked through his creation, through what we regard as the 'ordinary, the 'everyday'. If someone has grown up in the same street and in seemingly similar circumstances as us, how can he be **that** different to us? And in this age of cynicism, don't we often look for reasons why we should **not** be impressed by what we see or hear?

John's Gospel makes it clear that Christ's giving of himself involved far more than his incarnation, his death and resurrection. In **day to day** living he, like us, was met by much misunderstanding and misjudgement. In our reading, Jesus is talking clearly and with force about why he has come, yet still people misunderstand why he is there.

He explains that he's not there to make claims for himself, but is building on what they should **already** know about God. From the beginning of his creation, God has been working, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to help our hearts to be receptive to him and to share in his life.

But why does God make such an extraordinary choice? Why does he give **us** the power to continue to grieve the Holy Spirit by our unwillingness to acknowledge our dependence on God, and on each other? God doesn't **need** us, since he himself is all-powerful. But perhaps it's this graceful, freewill offering of a relationship with him which we simply can't get our heads round! What's in it for God?

Of course, we can always rely on Paul for sound, practical advice. In our reading from Ephesians, he reckons that the main threat to the internal harmony of the community in Ephesus is 'talk'. Anger and lying seem to be tearing the community apart, so Paul gives them advice on how they should be living if they claimed to be followers of Christ.

"Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger, and wrangling and slander, together with all malice - and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God, in Christ, has forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and **live in love.**"

Of course, Paul is telling **us**, too, that God wants us to choose to have a relationship with him because he loves us, **all of us**, as his children. Therefore, we should remember what he's done for us and, if we wish to return this love we must also love his **other** children. We are not in competition with each other. We should be helping each other, as we would our brothers and sisters within our own family.

We are not to let evil talk come out of our mouths but only whatever is useful for building each other up. However, this does not mean we should not have strong feelings about aspects of life.. And far from telling us **not** to get angry, Paul says there are some things every Christian **should** get angry about, but that none of these should involve perceived injustices which we ourselves have suffered.

.Its not **our** supremacy that should interest us, but Christ's, and he has told us to love and care for one another. We should, therefore, be livid when **others** have been unfairly treated, unjustly maligned, or ignored!

While Jesus was normally the most tolerant of people, he became enraged in the Jerusalem temple when he found his fellow Jews blocking off the entrance to the only part of the temple open to non-Jews, in order to buy and sell animals for sacrifice.

This was not hurting Jesus directly but it was hurting visitors to the temple and, with such behaviour, how could the Jews -chosen by God to learn that he is a good shepherd- then expect to effectively spread the good news to other peoples and nations?

However, while we may get angry, we have to be careful how we channel that anger. We are human and we find it very easy to be critical of others, but, if we think someone has done something wrong or is acting stupidly, its the way in which we deal with them that counts.

Being a healthy Christian community is important, not just to make us happier, or to enable us to better explain Jesus to others. If we are not a strong, loving community, we show that we don't really understand God and so we undermine our witness to the world. Why should others be interested in what we tell them about how Christ has changed our lives if we are not seen as living in harmony with each other?

The way we live together demonstrates our family resemblance, and others can begin to see what God, our Father, is like. The Holy Spirit is tasked with the job of building us into the likeness of Jesus, the Son, so we too can love the Father. But, as God has chosen to work through us, anything we do which damages our common life causes grief to the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us that, if Christ is supreme in our lives, our words should build each other up, not beat each other down.. A word of encouragement does far more good than a barrage of criticism. But if we are to be effective encouragers in the name of Christ, we need regular contact with him, regular nourishment.

Jesus offers us this nourishment when he says in today's Gospel reading that he is the Bread of Life and invites us to come to him, to feed on him. When the Son of God extends such an invitation, let's not trivialise his approach. The principal ingredients of the Bread he offers are love, compassion and the promise of salvation.

We will shortly be gathering at the table of our Lord; and we will be saying the words 'Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one Bread.' Let's then, nourished by the Bread of Life, go out to **live in love** with one another.