

22 January 2012

Reading: John 6:25-40 (NT page 1071)

What is the relevance of bread and wine?

In our reading Jesus addresses the real reason why the people were looking for him. They were looking for earthly food, to be filled with earthly bread. They did not seek Jesus because of whom He was. No they purely came because He could provide them with their temporarily daily needs namely bread. Barley bread was probably the most widely used. Wheat bread was more highly prized and was probably fairly common.

So this passage is about Jesus who is teaching them the real truth of His identity and mission. It is also Jesus as the rabbi who corrected them by saying it was not Moses who gave the people manna in the desert as a sign. It was God His father who provided in their needs. God will give them the bread of heaven. Totally ignorant, they asked: Give us of this bread?

Jesus then explained that God sent him as the bread of life. Whoever comes to Jesus will never go spiritually hungry, and he who believes in Him will never be spiritually thirsty. It is interesting to note that John does use the Greek word for faith but the verb "believing" - to emphasize that it is a commitment, a deliberate choice, an act!

The discussion up to this point had been focused on bread, but in the second part of 6:35 the focus is widened to include parallel images of eating and drinking. This combination was familiar to the Jewish people because the exodus stories contained miracles of both food and drink. So it is no surprise that the images were adopted by Jesus as a symbolic representation of one's relationship to him.

In the last verses, Jesus explained His mission on earth. He came to do the will of God and God's will is that all mankind shall believe in Him.

So what is the relevance of bread and wine?

Well as Jesus explained in our passage – every living soul in Biblical times knew that bread and wine were part of their everyday life. Bread gave them life and helped them not to starve. Wheat, barley, and spelt were used and were easily available. So it became a powerful metaphor explaining that Jesus would spiritually give life to all who believes in Him. And wine would again serve the purpose of relieving one's thirst and in this context whoever believes in Jesus will never ever be spiritually thirsty. The fruit of the vine was extensively cultivated in Palestine and available.

Bread and wine became the symbol of what Jesus did for humanity. And because Jesus sat with His disciples eating the last supper, it would also serve to be a powerful metaphor.

Meals were very important in Biblical times. You would nae eat with people who had less status than yourselves and you would not eat with people whom you did nae particularly like. The bread and wine being part of a meal makes you and me remember that Jesus wants us to be of one mind, one body and one spirit with Him and with one another. We cannae share our faith in the Lord Jesus if we are not at peace with our brothers and sisters.

In our society bread and wine is also important albeit for different reasons. In our society it became the symbol of those who have in contrast to those who have not. We know the popular musical that was adapted from the novel *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo. In this story the main character stole bread so he could feed his sister's children during a time of economic depression and were sentenced to five years for the theft. More recently we saw horrible pictures of the people of Somali who were starving – who did not have bread at all.

And wine often becomes in our society a weapon in the hands of the vulnerable that cannot use it in moderation and often lead to all kinds of social problems.

So although we attach different meaning to bread and wine, we must return to the fact that the world is in the current state because of the fact that we do not always realise that Jesus is the bread of life. We forget that through Jesus Christ we have received everything we need. We do not need to exploit others to get more what we want. We lose focus when it comes to money, wealth versus happiness and

peace. We tend to be so selfish when it comes to the things that differentiate our society, by sharing what we have like bread and wine, with those who have not and making sure those who cannot use wine in moderation do not abuse it. We can offer those who want to drink away their problems, the love and forgiveness of Jesus. We can show them with our lives of faith that we constantly get help from God's Holy Spirit when things are going tough.

So let us return to the original meaning of why we eat the bread and drink the wine – we eat the bread because Jesus is the bread of life who gave us the hope of the new life to be forever with God in His kingdom, and we drink from the wine because Jesus' blood saved us from sin, death and hell. And as bread and wine was accessible to all, so is His invitation open to everyone who responds in faith. It is God who is inviting us and it is God that promises us that if we come to Jesus we will never go spiritually hungry, and if we believe in Him will never be spiritually thirsty!

May we go from here and hold on to the promise of God!

Amen