

Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the 'Eight Days'

5 June – 12 June 2011

Day 5 – Thursday 9 June

BREAKING THE BREAD IN HOPE

Readings

Exodus 16: 13b-21a

It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat

Psalms 116: 12-19

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice

1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Do this in remembrance of me

John 6:53-58

This is the bread that came down from heaven ...

Commentary

From the first Church at Jerusalem until now, the 'breaking of bread' has been a central act for Christians. For the Christians of Jerusalem today, the sharing of bread traditionally speaks of friendship, forgiveness and commitment to the other. We are challenged in this breaking of bread to seek a unity that can speak prophetically to a world of divisions. This is the world by which we have all, in different ways, been shaped. In the breaking of bread Christians are formed anew for the prophetic message of hope for all humankind.

Today we, too, break bread 'with glad and generous hearts'; but we also experience, at each celebration of the Eucharist, a painful reminder of our disunity. On this fifth day of the Week of Prayer, the Christians of Jerusalem gather in the Upper Room, the place of the Last Supper. Here, whilst they do not celebrate the Eucharist, they break bread in *hope*.

We learn this hope in the ways God reaches out to us in the wilderness of our own discontent. Exodus relates how God responds to the grumbling of the people he has liberated, by providing them with what they need – no more, and no less. The manna in the desert is a gift of God, not to be hoarded, nor even fully understood. It is, as our Psalm celebrates, a moment which calls simply for thanksgiving – for God 'has loosened our bonds'.

What Paul recognises is that to break the bread means not only to celebrate the Eucharist, but to be a Eucharistic people – to *become* Christ's Body in the world. This short reading stands, in its context (1 Cor 10-11) as a reminder of how the Christian community is to live: in communion in Christ, determining right behaviour in a difficult worldly context, guided by the reality of our life in Him. We live "in remembrance of him."

As a people of the breaking of bread, we are a people of eternal life – life in its fullness – as the reading from John teaches us. Our celebration of Eucharist challenges us to reflect on how such an abundant gift of life is expressed day to day as we live in hope as well as in difficulties. In spite of the daily challenges for the Christians in Jerusalem, they witness to how it is possible to rejoice in hope.

For Reflection/Discussion

- In our various denominations, we don't all 'break bread' as sacrament in the same way or with the same frequency when we gather for worship. But when we come together in the name of Jesus 'with glad and generous hearts' there is sacramentality in what we do. Discuss.
- In what ways is the Eucharist a 'prophetic message of hope'?
- Paul speaks to the church in Corinth about right attitudes and ethical living in the community of Christ (1 Cor. 10). How does this transpose to our circumstances today, as we come to the Lord's Table?

Prayer

God of Hope, we praise you for your gift to us of the Lord's Supper, where, in the Spirit, we continue to meet your Son Jesus Christ, the living bread from heaven. Forgive our unworthiness of this great gift – our living in factions, our collusion with inequalities, our complacency in separation. Hasten the day when your whole church together shares the breaking of the bread, and that, as we wait for that day, we may learn more deeply to be a people formed by the Eucharist for service to the world. We pray in the name of Jesus, who gives himself to us in Word, sacrament and service. Amen.