

Along the track

The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

It is often the simplest things that mean the most, that stay in our mind, the ordinary events that we tend to take for granted. There is such a scene in John's Gospel (John 21:1-14) when Jesus meets seven of his disciples after the Resurrection by the shore of Lake Tiberius. After Jesus' death, these disciples had sought consolation in what they knew – they went back home to fish.

Perhaps as had happened on occasions before, they didn't catch a thing that night. Early the next morning Jesus stood on the shore and called out "Friends, have you caught anything?" "No!" they answered and you can hear the exasperation in that reply - tiredness, disappointment and disillusionment.

So he told them, "Let your net down on the right side of your boat, and you will catch some fish." They did, and the net was so full of fish that they could not drag it up into the boat.

When the disciples finally got back to shore, they saw some bread and a charcoal fire with fish on it. Jesus told his disciples, "Bring some of the fish you just caught, come and eat!" Jesus took the bread in his hands and gave some of it to his disciples. He did the same with the fish. This was the third time that the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples. It must have been a shock to them, hard to fathom, hard to come to terms with, hard to believe – they may have even been apprehensive, a bit afraid. After all, they had deserted him in his hour of need. Peter even denied that he knew him! But this quiet almost intimate scene is one of comfort, forgiveness and encouragement. Perhaps one might have expected a more spectacular appearance but the resurrected Jesus comes in the way He always did – in the simple, ordinary, informal way the disciples knew. This is a scene of closeness and familiarity, kindness, sensitivity and understanding. There are no harsh words of recrimination, no blame or hectoring. Just acceptance and understanding. I wonder how many times before they had shared similar meals by the lake. In this way, in the simple and the ordinary, in what they knew and were used to, Jesus comes to reassure them.

The resurrected Jesus comes to us in many forms, mostly in the ordinary, in the people and daily events that make up the fabric of our lives, in the people who have supported us, challenged us, encouraged us, inspired us throughout our lives, those who stood with us when we are most in need, those who encouraged us in hard times and those who rejoiced with us in the good times.

They are the messengers of God who came at the right time, just when we needed them.

We often don't acknowledge them. It is easy to take them for granted. In the same way, it is easy to overlook the simple pleasures and events in our lives that teach us so much, that sustain us and enhance the quality of our lives.

We often don't acknowledge that we too need assurance on our empty days, that faith is a gift to be treasured and nurtured and that there are times when we are called to trust in the blessings of God's presence.

John includes the rather wry comment that "none of the disciples dared ask who he was even though they knew he was the Lord!" We too can be a bit incredulous, disbelieving of the presence of the Divine in the ordinary, to realise that each day is sacred. We find the presence of God in similar ways to the breakfast by the lake – in the ordinary pleasures of sharing food, of enjoying the company of others, delighting in the joys of music or the sounds of laughter and play. They are reminders of God's continuing presence in creation.

We find God's continuing presence in the reassurance that life offers us new possibilities each day as God calls us to work with our gifts and talents, to be of service to others. God calls us through the people we meet who need us in good times and in the tough times. We are called in the events that we celebrate and those we want to change, in the ways we work to bring justice to those who are unfairly treated, happiness, consolation and companionship to the lonely or grieving. We find reassurance when we open our eyes and minds and hearts to see the wonder and beauty of creation gifted to us by the Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. We are sometimes called to make visible the invisible things of creation – love, joy, compassion, loyalty, endurance, commitment, peace, harmony.

The resurrected Jesus comes to us in the very ordinary gifts of bread and wine. It takes faith and courage to believe that the God of all Creation comes to us in this way and that we are nourished and forgiven and reassured by such humble food. Its beauty lies in the fact that it is in such a way that Jesus comes – not in an intimidating or grandiose form, not in a way that makes us afraid or distant but in the way of invitation, of companionship and friendship. Just like on the shores of Lake Tiberius, when we come to the Eucharist, when we accept Jesus' invitation to celebrate with Him, we bring with us the fabric our lives. It is in these simple gifts that we find reassurance, forgiveness, encouragement, understanding.

Pope Francis recently said: "In the Eucharist, Jesus gives himself to us, shares our journey and, in fact, makes himself the food that sustains our lives, even when the road gets rough and obstacles slow our steps."

Regards
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