

FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD dtw Pentecost 10 2024 All Souls
Marking Lazarus Day and the Annual Service 28 July

Ephesians 3.18-19 *I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

How these words might have captured the lives of Lazarus, Mary and Martha in their home at Nazareth. You might recall a visit Jesus made to the two sisters in an idyllic setting (Luke 10) where Mary sat at his feet and Martha prepared some food. I'm sure the whole house was filled with the fullness and fragrance of God's love. Lazarus wasn't there at that time, but he loved Jesus very much. We learn that from John 11 when he became ill. How wonderful that the Commemoration for all three of these devoted siblings falls on July 29 and that we can come together as members of the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem and members of this Church of All Souls to celebrate.

Today, we are given such rich treasure in our readings; more secrets of this deeper, abundant life that Christ wants to share with all his followers; pearls beyond human price. The author of Ephesians writes of the God who by the divine 'power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine' ascribing to God 'glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever' (Eph 3. 20,21). In our Gospel from John people are fed and filled to overflowing and may we note the words, 'When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost".' These people were 'satisfied' not just by physical sustenance, but by the Bread of Life! That's what John 6 is all about: this too is food for the long haul of life, not just a passing snack. But elsewhere the poor disciples still don't get it. In Mark 8, after no less than 2 such feedings, the disciples had only one loaf in the boat and they were annoyed. "We have no bread" they exclaimed. Jesus said, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" Perhaps today he might have added, "Don't tell me you're now going to panic-buy!"

Let me share a reflection from a little book of mine on this very human phenomenon:

Remember the old saying, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink"? Jesus had the same problem with his disciples. In this case it was living water and they were stubborn mules. It was living bread, but he couldn't make them eat. It was eternal life, but he couldn't make them have faith, not while they were so materially, physically, temporally minded. They were just plain thick! As bricks. And you and I can be the same. Like the disciples, we concentrate on the bread rather than the giver of the bread, and when there doesn't seem to be enough we panic. We place a giant chasm between ourselves and God.

Lord, how often I have gone away from the Eucharist and closed my eyes and ears to what has happened. The Bread of Life. The Cup of Salvation. I have very quickly become preoccupied about other things. I have not perceived. I have not understood. I have hardened my heart against you. Next time, please, may my leap of faith be real.

(dtw *If Fish is all you Want* 1983)

Do *you* want to be 'filled with the fullness of God'? Ask yourself that question. The NT Greek word for fullness is just beautiful: 'pleroma'. It rhymes with aroma! The powerful fragrance of God: Divine Love. The problem is that most of us are hooked into more superficial things; I guess it's an inevitable part of our modern, western living. True fullness of joy can only break into our lives from a divine source, and cannot be found in the house of preoccupation, distraction and mere routine. That was Martha's dilemma in that lovely domestic story from Luke 10. To be sure, many attempts are made to produce joy in our lives: family gatherings, cruising the Whitsundays, surprise parties, a win by the Crows or the Power. These fleeting experiences are no doubt *enjoyable*, but they too, are just the icing: true joy, however, lies in waiting and longing, deeper, deeper in the heart. It's a bit like the difference between 'falling in love' and the sheer wonder and power of rich long-term love. Falling in love is like the icing. Abiding love is what takes you through the long haul, whether with a partner, a friend, or with God.

Sadly, many people hardly believe anymore in the possibility of a truly joy-filled life. They have more or less accepted life as a sentence and are grateful for any occasion that creates the illusion of the opposite: a suspense novel, a sexual experience, a few hours aided by wine or some heightened state of consciousness. Henri Nouwen calls this 'happiness in the house of fear', one that is 'neither lasting nor deeply satisfying'. A big reason for the existence of Centres for Spirituality, Retreats and Spiritual Direction is this very cause. How is your spiritual health? It's an important question, because your spiritual health is your *real* health; it's the only health that matters for the long haul. The search for spiritual wholeness also marks the difference between merely *running a church* (or a Christian Order) like any other frenetic organisation and *being a living organism* of broken but hope-filled human beings, seeking our true *reason-for-being* - a community living with the aroma of Divine Love.

Looking back over the readings these last few weeks, you may have detected a common, subtle thread. I have. God has been holding us in a tender, balanced embrace in all-sufficient grace, purity of worship, extravagant love, abundant life and fullness of joy. Can you smell the beautiful fragrance, the *pleroma* of it all?

Grace and Peace be with you. Amen