

A Generous Orthodoxy

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A — 5 February, 2023

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Isaiah 58.1-9a (9b-12); Psalm 112.1-9 (10); 1 Corinthians 2.1-13 (14-16); Matthew 5.13-20.

'Salt of the earth': a common adage from the New Testament that has found its way into our vernacular. When I read this morning's passage from Isaiah another came to mind—'going through the motions', a common saying in our language and idiom. It seems to have first come into common usage around the time of the industrial revolution. Many folk in the early 1800s took the newly-created railways into the city to live and work seeking better lives for themselves and their families. Many, of course, ended up living in a squalid slum; their working lives were difficult and dangerous. There was no sense of achievement in the world of mass production, work entailed little, if any, creativity. There was no beauty, certainly no love, their individualism was removed they were part of the machine they were literally going through the motions.

We can find this 'going through the motions' criticised in our reading from Isaiah. He speaks out against the religious observances of his day. He criticises the bosses, who are very pious, but mistreat their workers; he criticises the workers who fight and quarrel when they fast. He is adamant, their religious observances have an ethical imperative which is missing—they were simply 'going through the motions.'

During the week our journey—understanding 'Missional Spirituality'—commenced. The Rectors of the four parishes involved met here at St Philip's. We introduced ourselves to each other and spoke about our parishes and our hopes for the journey. Despite our different contexts and perspectives, a common thread arose: basically the desire to be salt and light in our parish communities: to bring light and to add flavour. The term 'generous orthodoxy' was used, we were concerned to ensure that our faith is proclaimed boldly but in such a way that we indeed bring the light of Christ to bear in our communities in such a way that is attractive . . . flavoursome! Despite our large buildings, we all felt somewhat invisible to those around us. The Church it seems has little to say to those in our community whose aspirations, lifestyles, and hopes have moved so far away or on the other hand has moved so close to wider society, championing the causes of our day, that we have nothing really different to say; we have become invisible. We clearly need a middle way, a generous orthodoxy.

When speaking about Spirituality, a somewhat rubbery term for many, it is perhaps easier to look at what we already do and then work backwards, because our worship, our ethic, is a reflection of our spirituality. The documents of the Second Vatican Council are helpful here. They called the Eucharist "the source and summit" of Christian spirituality. To say this means at least two things. First, that Christian spirituality flows from the Eucharist as its source, the way light streams forth from the sun. And second, that Christian spirituality *is* supremely the Eucharist as its summit or high-point—that to which all of our actions should ultimately be directed. At St Philip's our spirituality is broadly Eucharistic.

At the heart of a Eucharistic spirituality are the words of Jesus spoken at the Last Supper at recalled at the altar, 'Take, eat. *This is my body given for you.*

Do this in remembrance of me' and 'Drink from this all of you. *This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many* for the forgiveness of sins. Do, this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.'

This is my Body and Blood, it is all very earthy, very real, intimate even! So if the gift of a body is at the heart of our Spirituality, it should as no surprise to hear that among the most profound ways to express who we are is the giving of ourselves, our bodies, to someone else and thereby stands the stumbling block that is perhaps at the heart one of the issues facing the Church and its unity and from there its mission to the world.

There are many reasons for the problems that we face in the Church and in society, too many to consider for a time such as this. But I do wonder if one of the problems we face is that everything now has become a form of entertainment, there are many things that we don't take seriously enough. The Eucharist is not entertainment, it is among the most important things you will do during your week. Bodies too have been trivialised, along with our sexuality and with it our approach to marriage, it's all about being entertained. The Church has become just a little obsessed with sex and has failed to engage properly with the matters of the Body, and what it really means to give completely of oneself to another: the heart of a Eucharistic spirituality.

So as we begin this journey discovering a Missional Spirituality, one of the questions that we need to ask is are we 'going through the motions'? Can we discover this generous orthodoxy in which we hold to our faith and find within it an openness to the community in which we live and work and learn. Can we shine a light into the community around us and bring some flavour, some meaning and purpose to lives dulled by bad entertainment and a boredom that is tasteless.

It is often said I know that our mission begins at the door of the Church. This very true of this journey we are about to embark upon. Notice in our gospel when Jesus speaks of the light it is first in the context of the home. In Dicken's *Bleak House*, the character Mrs Jellyby has what Dickens called 'telescopic philanthropy,' she could see nothing nearer than Africa! She loved Africans in particular but did not notice the existence of her own children! St Ælred the Abbot of Rievaulx in Yorkshire warned the monks against 'a love that in addressing itself to all, reaches no one.'

Our journey is first to the interior, and from that place to those around us. It is sustained by our Eucharistic spirituality through which we reveal what it means to give of oneself, to be prepared to be vulnerable, open, generous, to be a gift. To truly be the light and salt that our community needs us to be and which I believe craves. This is my body. Amen.