



Artwork by Moya Hogarth

Homily 19 2 August 2020

O come to the water all you who are thirsty

Today's readings are exuberant, vivid, joyous, rich. They have a lot to say to us at this time of uncertainty and, for many people, real difficulty. The first reading and the Gospel reading each work at two levels: first, the physical and the literal; secondly, the spiritual and relational – our relationship with God, our trust in God.

The first reading, from Isaiah, dates from about the time when the captive Hebrews were about to be, or perhaps already had been, released from their captivity in Babylon. They were at the beginning of a renewal of their communal life in the land from which they had been deported. "With you I will make an everlasting covenant out of the favours promised to David". David's dual kingdom of Israel and Judah, destroyed by civil wars and foreign invasion, is to be succeeded by a new covenant between the revived Jewish people, settled again in their homeland, and God. They are to share a fruitful common life. They will be welcome to a life-giving feast.

The Gospel reading today is so important that it is the only account of Jesus's "signs", or miracles, that all four evangelists included in their Gospel accounts. Mark's account is the more detailed; Matthew's is stripped to the essentials.

In this episode Jesus has been going round the towns and villages at the NW side of the Sea of Galilee teaching and curing people, and has sent his disciples to do the same. He goes off by boat to be alone. Mark tells us that the twelve, returning from their mission, are tired and hungry so Jesus invites them to go with him. But the crowds need him so much that they follow him along the shore. So, he takes pity on them and heals their sick. When evening comes the disciples suggest Jesus send the crowds off to the nearby villages so they can buy themselves some food. But Jesus says “No need for that – give them something to eat yourselves”. He then holds an impromptu banquet. He tells the people to sit down on the grass. He raises his eyes to heaven and says the blessing, probably the Berakah, the blessing said by the head of the family at Jewish family meals – “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth”. He then breaks the bread and hands it to his disciples to give to the crowds. The people all eat and are satisfied.

Does this seem familiar? Of course, the food satisfies the immediate physical hunger of the people. But the words of this Gospel account clearly look forward to the Last Supper and the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist. They also look forward to the Kingdom of God portrayed in Jewish and Christian scripture as a heavenly banquet to which everyone, all nations, we ourselves, are invited.

At this difficult time of pandemic, when many are struggling physically or financially, Jesus also says something very practical directly to us: “Give them something to eat yourselves”. We can put things in the food-bank box or give online to one or more various appeal funds.

At this difficult time, today’s epistle also reminds us very directly that “Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked. These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us.”.

Every blessing to you all

Deacon Julian Burling