

OT: Exodus 16.2-4,9-15

NT: Ephesians 4.1-16

Gp: John 6.24-35

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love.

The events of this past week, and indeed yesterday in our city, have shocked this country. We have seen one heartbreaking act of violence used as a catalyst, an excuse for mindless thuggery to target the rule of law and reinforce bigotry against people who may look different. Hatred stoked up by those who kept themselves a clean distance from the brutality, having preyed on the ignorant and the weak-minded to do their dirty work.

Whatever the motive, the intentions, of that young man when he wreaked havoc on those innocent victims, judgement and justice belong to the law of this country and to God. Our part is to be there for those families shattered by loss, both in prayer and practical help wherever we can. Nothing can justify the subsequent actions of those hot-headed and weak who like any excuse for a spot of rioting. We leave them too to the criminal justice system and to God while we stand in solidarity with all victims of violence and discrimination, *speaking the truth in love.*

As Fr Bill indicated last week, for a short while we have stepped aside from the gospel of Mark to concentrate on Chapter 6 of John's gospel. In this morning's reading, the crowds come searching for Jesus, not because they understand his teaching but because they are fascinated by the miracle of feeding so many with so little. As Jesus says: *Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.*

To be fair, some of them could relate what they had witnessed back to the stories of manna in the desert when God fed their ancestors with a form of bread from heaven. Ancestors who complained against God, who conveniently forgot their treatment as slaves in Egypt, who were calling for bread rather than freedom.

As Chapter 6 unfolds, we will read that the people of Jesus' time were no more grateful for God's miracles than their ancestors, they too failed to see the gift they were being given. Failed to see that God in his mercy and love did not abandon an ungrateful people, did not leave them to their own vices and devices but intervened to save them.

If you attempt Bishop John's challenge of reading the whole Bible this summer, you will not only have the measurements to build your own ark, you will also see a recurring thread across the Old Testament which is picked up in the New and throughout subsequent history. And if we're honest, also within our own lives.

That thread is humanity happy to go its own way while things are going well, there is no need for God. Within that complacency, evil finds a toehold until it thrives. There is bloodshed, discrimination, a breakdown of community and mutual support. And in their despair, the people turn to God, save us from

the power of Pharaoh, the Philistines, the Fascists, the Nazis. Save us from ourselves. And God always intervenes, and all is well for a while until self-satisfaction sets in again and the cycle repeats itself.

God tries to offer a more permanent solution. Perhaps his hope was that in the desert, once they had full stomachs, the Israelites would think less about themselves and more about the needs of those they journeyed with. Likewise, the bread that God is offering through Jesus is to sustain and maintain humanity through the changes and challenges of this world.

For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

The Eucharist is central to our faith as believers in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the gift of grace through the body and blood of Jesus Christ, given through the love of the Father and by the power of the Holy Spirit. But we don't receive Communion alone, the very word tells out that we share this amazing gift with others with the people of God, past, present and future. We are members of a club where we can receive not only sustaining food but the support and love of those around us. We exist not in isolation but as members of the body of Christ. Each one of us has our own unique part to play, each one of us has been given a gift to contribute to the good of all.

As Paul puts it in his letter to the Ephesians: *But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

Never think that you are not important, that there is no part for you to play. Afterall, one dropped stitch will ruin the whole knitted garment.

This week we have witnessed great tragedy, we have seen ugly, mindless violence but we have also seen a community coming together to try to repair the damage, an image of the unity of humanity in the body of Christ made visible in the building of a Mosque wall.

Thanks be to God.

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