

This Sunday, the 21st in Ordinary Time Year B, having taken leave of the normal readings while we celebrated the solemnities of Saint Mary of the Cross and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we return to chapter 6 of Saint John's gospel.

John 6 is famously known for its "Bread of Life" discourse, in which Jesus delivers his teaching on the Eucharist in the synagogue at Capernaum. (Capernaum is a village or township on the north western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is where Jesus made his home after he departed Nazareth. So we can think of the Capernaum Synagogue as his "parish church" at which he regularly attended Sabbath worship.)

Remember that Saint John's gospel omits an account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. The three synoptic gospels, of Matthew, Mark and Luke include similar accounts of Jesus taking bread and wine at the Last Supper and, anticipating his total offering of himself to the Father on Calvary and his resurrection from the dead, he transforms them into his own Body and Blood. John does not. He replaces the Synoptics institution narrative with an account of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. The point John is making in doing this is screamingly obvious: our reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is synonymous with our humble service of others. Jesus states that he gives his flesh for the life of the world, not just for the satisfaction of our own Eucharistic hunger, as real and vitally important as that may be. Our human sharing in the divine life, which we receive in the Eucharist, simultaneously moves us to humble service of others.

One of the catch-phrases of Catholic theology – cited in so many teaching documents from the Holy See – is that the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, is "the source and summit" of the Christian life. The origins of the phrase are complex, but it entered mainstream Catholic discourse with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) in this sentence: "Indeed, the liturgy is the summit (*culmen*) towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fountain (*fons*) from which all her power flows." (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*,10) This is particularly true of Sunday Mass, the *Missa pro populo* - "the Mass for the people" of the parish which I continue to offer for your well-being, for your eternal salvation and your mission as the Catholic parish of Surry Hills. The Archbishop does likewise for all the people of the Church in Sydney and our mission to "Go Make Disciples". All our other activity, our life and mission, flows principally from this Sunday Eucharistic celebration and returns to it. The Blessed Sacrament, which of course can only be confected within the context of Holy Mass, remains present in the tabernacle of our parish church. The tabernacle is therefore clearly the most important space in Surry Hills. Even though the church is presently closed, we should be mindful to make an act of reverence towards the Lord's presence in the Blessed Sacrament whenever we are passing by our parish church of Saint Peter.

A territorial parish, as is Saint Peter's and the overwhelming majority of Catholic parishes, is in the first place a Eucharistic community drawn primarily from the Catholic people of the parish's own territory. Each week the front page of our parish bulletin highlights the Eucharistic slogan of Pope Francis from his 2018 Catechesis on the Mass: "Partaking in the Eucharist commits us to

others, especially the poor, teaching us to pass from the flesh of Christ to the flesh of our brothers and sisters, in whom he waits to be recognised, served, honoured and loved by us.”(Pope Francis, Catechesis on the Mass 2018)

The parish of Saint Peter’s at Surry Hills has the poor on the doorstep of the parish church itself. So we have a perfect opportunity there. Our idea of parish cannot be confined to the parish church and the parish property itself. Our reception of Holy Communion in this parish needs to issue in the service of others, of all the people who live within our parish, particularly the poor. There is also great scope for serving, honouring and loving beyond the poor because the vast majority of people in Surry Hills are not poor.

The principal missionary role allotted to this Catholic parish of Surry Hills in “Go Make Disciples”, the great evangelization project of Archbishop Fisher for Sydney, is to the people of Surry Hills. This is the way the church is constituted and governed for the most effective pastoral care of its own and the most effective execution of its mission to all people. His Grace’s project echoes the chant of Pope Francis whose regular refrain has been that “to be a Catholic parish is to be a missionary parish”. (Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church", of the Congregation for the Clergy, 20.07.2020)

It is interesting that the last twelve months have seen a sharp reversal of a trend that has been gradually increasing throughout my lifetime. The trend in the western world, at least since the 1950’s, has been for people to be constantly escaping their local community to work, recreate, socialize and worship elsewhere. Recent COVID related circumstances have acutely reversed that trend and obliged us to focus once again on the area and on the community in which we actually live.

That said, this parish also plays host to a significant number of young adult Catholics who come from all over Sydney each Sunday for the Eucharist and subsequent prayers, topical Catholic presentations and social activities. The parish is very happy to accommodate such a movement. Saint Peter’s Church Young Adults is flourishing and has the potential to lead a much larger Sydney wide network of Latin and Eastern Church (both Catholic and Orthodox) young adults. The reason for the existence of such a group is obvious: often enough in our times, if Catholic young adults were to worship in the parish where they live or work they may well be the only ones of their age group in the congregation. Saint Peter’s provides a relatively central location for Sydney Catholic young adults to gather. However, the hope is that time spent in the young adult community at Saint Peter’s will result in them eventually becoming pillars of the parishes where these same young adults eventually put down roots in the next phase of their lives. Our parishes will be more effective as missionary parishes if the lay leaders of our parishes live and/or work in our parishes. This is because they see the parish from within it in their daily lives. The recent popes have increasingly emphasised that to be a Catholic parish is to be a missionary parish.

As Jesus teaches in his own local synagogue that he himself is the bread of life, he is rejected by “many of his disciples”. They walk away from him. However, he stands by his teaching, asking those who remain, “will you walk away too?” To which they reply, “To whom shall we go?” Sometimes we do not understand Jesus and his teaching ourselves but, with God’s grace to help us, we remain steadfast in our attachment to him and his Church as the one and only ultimate Saviour of ourselves and all people.

Jesus said of himself, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me” (John: 4:34). What is our food? What feeds us; what motivates us? Is it pleasure, or wealth, or status, or power and control over our own situation and over others? Or is it what will truly make us free, gives us life, peace and joy - Jesus feeding our human lives with his own divine life in word and sacrament, feeding us with his very Person through his Holy Spirit as he cries out, “Let all who are thirsty come to me and drink” (John 7:37-38), by which he means to drink of his Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus and of the Father who quenches our own chronic thirst for God; and replenishes us to go out and lead others ultimately to the Eucharistic fountain of God’s life and love for each and every one of them.

I strongly urge us all to be online this Sunday morning from 10.30am for as Archbishop Fisher presides at this Sunday’s Eucharist from Saint Mary’s Cathedral. This Sunday, His Grace will join with NCC leaders in praying for us all during these trying times as our chief pastor and will share his care for us all in the homily.