Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
30th August 2009
Year B

Sometimes the Church is accused of being hypocritical, e.g. " they say they love God and their neighbour as themselves but all they care about is looking after themselves" etc. Today's gospel and NT reading give us an opportunity to consider this accusation.

One of the problems the early Church faced was how much it should still follow the laws and customs of the Jewish Food laws became an issue. The Jews had developed habits of cleanliness which were admirable for maintenance of health in a hot climate, we see it in kosher and the halal food of Muslims. Strict observance of these had become so central and ritualised in Jesus' day that the reasons behind the laws had often become obscured. In (Mark 7. 1-8, 14-23) we see a situation where the disciples clearly flouted the current practice.

Jesus challenged the insistence on ceremonial purity and insisted it was not what a person touched or ate which defiled him but the evil things he contrived in his own heart. A horrifying list, no doubt though, one we could add to! He used the opportunity to teach about purity of heart as distinct from ritual purity.

What do we make of this reading today? We are not meant to dwell on the question of hand and pot washing but on "religion that is pure and undefiled before God" (James 1.17-27). What does it mean to be religious? Today we might find Jesus criticizing so many people who regard themselves as religious but whose hearts are still producing evil thoughts: the outward show of praise from popular churches whose leaders are involved in fraud, preaching about love from those who abuse others or are racist or exclusive, over-attention to ritual from those who do no good works; exclusive groups who will only mix with people of their own faith and so on.

It is easy to criticize others from a distance yet all of us fall into the trap of thinking that certain behaviours are 'religious' and therefore favoured by God when in fact what God requires is a purity of heart and words of integrity, words accompanied by actions which match them.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
2nd August 2009
Year B

Unfortunately there seems to be no 'Sermon Outline for this Sunday from Dorothy Thorpe – sorry for any inconvenience.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
6th August 2009
Year B

"*For the time being, you're just going to have to take my word for it".* Have you ever felt like saying this to someone who doubts you? The author of II Peter faced the disbelief of early Christians about the promise of the future coming of Christ. They had expected an imminent, dramatic and visible return of Christ but as years passed, faith wavered. (II Peter 1.16-19 (20-21)

The author of the letter (only maybe Peter himself) draws on the experience of Peter to aver the truth of Jesus' promise, truth revealed to the apostles on a mountaintop. (Mark 9.2-10). There is no doubting what they saw: the majesty of God, the brightness of the great light shining from Jesus, who is shown as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets; the voice from heaven proclaiming Jesus as the beloved Son. These had a profound effect on the awe-struck Peter. This witness is Peter's assurance that Jesus' promises are true.

You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place—the authenticity of this witness is a symbol of hope to hold on to in the darkness of persecution, doubt, heresy and debate. The writer is sure that the Transfiguration is an historical fact. It is the earthly anticipation of Jesus' heavenly glory, and therefore makes the coming fulfillment of the return of Christ in glory assured. When that day dawns the morning star will rise in their hearts. "*For the time being, you're just going to have to take my word for it."*

Christ is not present with us now as he was in the days of his life on earth, and he is not yet present in the way he will be present in the day of his 'appearing'; not in his earthly body, and not yet in his visible glory; he is present in the reality of the Holy Spirit. During his incarnate life those with him often failed to recognize him, today we know him by faith, but in his coming at the end of the age he will appear in majesty to everyone, not just to the faithful.

The coming reign of Christ is a foundational Christian hope. *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.* It is beyond our reason, perhaps beyond our imagination, but the glimmer of that promise gives us courage to live in a world where darkness so often falls.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
23rd August 2009
Year B

Do you remember a program called The Hour of Decision? The idea of decision reminds us of altar calls and Billy Graham crusades, perhaps of a kind of Christianity you are uncomfortable with. But the theme of decision about the truth of Jesus must be faced by all of us.

Jesus' disciples faced it. Jesus claimed that he was the bread of life and that belief in him was the way to eternal life. Some said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" and many of them turned away from him and rejected him. But the twelve stayed, with Peter acting as their spokesman, with a confession of faith. (John 6.56-69)

Each of us must make this same decision and declare [I] have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' As children, many of us had the decision made for us in Baptism (see p.56 AAPB) but ultimately we need to make it for ourselves in Confirmation and perhaps time and time again through our adult lives. Sad indeed are those who seem not to have decided that Christ is indeed the bread of life. Some of these people are outside the Church but sadly many who seem to belong have not made that decision which leads to decisive Christian living, ministry and mission.

In the face of divine revelation , we can face times of choice. Attempting to speak the word of God to the political and social realities often may cut across firmly held convictions. For some it is too hard and they turn away. Some people found it very hard to accept that God might be calling us to be compassionate to people in detention centres. At times there has been division about land rights for aboriginal people, acceptance of women for ordination, homosexual people, abortion and euthanasia. There can de division when the Church is trying to update itself to become a better means for the proclamation of the gospel. Congregations have seen division over furniture, new worship styles, new liturgies, new prayer books!

Times of choice can be times of conflict. Being a Christian does not always mean untroubled waters and smooth sailing for the gospel will always challenge us personally, as a Church, and in society. Each turmoil provides another time to decide who Jesus is and what he calls us to.

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
16th August 2009
Year B

The sacrament of eucharist is a great mystery with layers of meaning. It is food for our Christian journey but it also has the power to confer the life that triumphs over death. It is part of our understanding of eternal life. Jesus' statement in v. 51 expressed a profound theological truth about the great mystery of the sacrament.: *The one who eats this bread will live forever.*

When we celebrate the eucharist we are united into the Body of Christ: *We who are many are one Body for we all share in the one bread.* In the dismissal from the eucharist, *Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord,* we recognise the fact that we are united with Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his life of service to others.

The Eucharistic community is called to be a sacrificial community. The offering at the Eucharist is intimately part of the sacrifice of Christ and we extend the concept to us who share in it, the Body of Christ, a living sacrifice. Jesus gave himself as a voluntary offering of infinite value. Through Christ we have been sanctified so each of us is of infinite value, loved by God and precious in his sight.

In the Church, we need to know this and act upon it, valuing each child of God as a member of the Body, giving special value to those who need support, looking for and honouring the specific gifts and ministry of everyone . Offering ourselves in Christ's service. The words *holy* and *whole* are connected. To be a holy offering, we the Body of Christ need to be whole, a Body in which each person has an integral part.

Ephesians 5.11-21 (22-31) gives much-debated instructions about behaviour in the Christian community, which may be summarized quite simply : the Eucharistic community, the Church, is in a relationship of mutual love with Christ tenderly caring for his own flesh the Body of Christ. Our relationships in Church and family need to reflect this understanding of mutuality

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
9th August 2009
Year B

Most societies have a basic food which is a staple of life: bread, pasta, rice, taro, yams. So important are they that there are sometimes legends and folklore about them. Bread and water are regarded as minimal for survival. So we understand why Jesus chose bread as a metaphor for himself in one of his "I am" statements*, I am the bread of life. (*John 6.35, 41-51)

The metaphor of bread was particularly significant to the Jews whose ancestors had been fed by manna in the desert, food appearing from heaven when they faced starvation. Bread was closely associated with salvation and the feeding of pilgrims on the journey to the promised land. Yet even on the journey, people perished; Moses himself did not reach the promised land. Knowing this history, Jesus' words, *I am the living bread...whoever eats of this bread will live forever* must have held an amazing promise.

Christians very much believe that the eucharist is food for the journey, the Christian pilgrimage to the Father. We believe that we receive communion regularly as spiritual food to sustain us for in this way Christ is mysteriously in us and we are united in him. He abides in us and we in him.

Our hymns often express this truth: e.g. No 555 AHB *In faith and hope and love with joyful trust we move towards our Father's home above...Christ, our bread along the way". No 434, bread of heaven , on thee we feed* expresses a similar idea

We pilgrim people are a new creation, a forgiven people given new life. The Ephesians passage (Eph. 4.17-5.2 spells out the marks of this new creation, this resurrection community: truthful, forgiving, honest, with tongues controlled, peaceful and loving. Sharing in the one bread we also share in Christ's love and sacrifice. We ourselves become the fragrant offering of sacrifice as Jesus was.