

Parish and Liturgy Notes

to accompany Bishops' Statement on the occasion of the First National Famine Commemoration Day

17 May 2009

“To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren.” (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1997, no. 1397)

“Those who are in a position to help others will realise that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own.” (Pope Benedict XVI *God is Love* n 35)

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

The first National Commemoration of the Famine falls on the Sixth Sunday of Easter. The Commemoration may help to draw out the themes in today's readings:

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles (10:15-26, 34-35, 44-48), Cornelius's conversion is also a deeply significant moment for Peter. In this encounter and the prayer that underpins it, Peter, inspired by the Spirit's message of the goodness of all creation and of the total equality of all humanity before God, baptises the Gentile, Cornelius.

In 1 John 4, God's care for humanity is further explored. God's love for humanity, once experienced, invites us to love others: “whoever does not love does not know God.” In the face of the poverty and deprivation experienced by the poorest among us, we are called to love. In this way, the Psalmist's call to justice is echoed, for the throne of the Lord is built on “righteousness and justice.” (Psalm 97:2)

In the reading from John's Gospel, Jesus leaves us with a similarly definitive statement on love, reminding us that we should ‘love one another as I have loved you’. In these words, we are provided with arguably the simplest summary of our faith. As we are reminded by our Holy Father Benedict XVI in *God is Love*, when we know ourselves to be loved by God, the call to love others is “no longer a question of a ‘commandment’ imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others.”¹

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

At this time of commemoration, there is much that we can do in our parish communities:

- Going on pilgrimage is characteristic of Irish Catholicism, with penitential pilgrimages to sites like Lough Derg, Croagh Patrick or a local holy well being very important. Parish liturgy teams could organise a pilgrimage to a local famine site where the Eucharist might be celebrated.
- Children's and youth liturgies in parishes and schools could be prepared imaginatively with famine as a theme.
- Prayers or blessings could be led at known local sites of Famine graves.
- Special prayers could be included at the Prayer of the Faithful for the victims and generations of Irish emigrants who were displaced due to this national tragedy.
- Justice groups or Bible study groups could reflect on the themes of the Bishops' statement above in the light of the Word of God, including the scripture readings of the day.
- Prayer, Justice and Bible Study groups could re-awaken our ancient tradition of fasting which is so embedded in our language that weekdays are named after various fasts. Dé Céadaoin (the first fast), Déardaoin (the day between the two fasts, Dé hAoine (the fast). To fast in this way is to challenge the individualistic consumerism which is so characteristic of our times.

¹ *God is Love*, 2005, n.18

Key Messages in the Bishops' Statement

The key messages explored in the accompanying Bishops' statement are as follows:

- The Irish Famine deserves to be remembered with due solemnity;
- Hunger and famine affect even more people today than in 1995;
- In a world of plenty, people still go hungry;
- Famine happens largely as a result of human action – and inaction;
- Famine is caused and compounded by unjust political and economic structures which are often the fruit of the sinful behaviour of individuals;
- There is a growing reality of hunger and malnutrition in Ireland;
- Environmental destruction adds to hunger and famine;
- Christians are called to generous solidarity grounded in the values and rights inherent in the life and dignity of the human person;
- We see Christ's face in those who suffer from hunger and famine;
- Prayer is an inexhaustible source of loving service to neighbour;
- We are challenged to address the needs of the poor at home and to reach out in compassion to those suffering from famine in the world;
- Trócaire and the other relief and development agencies need our support;
- We call on governments to address the underlying causes of hunger and famine and to honour their promises on overseas aid.

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