

At this Mass we celebrate the lives of all those parishioners aged 90 or older. It's a celebration of our *nonagenarians*. As Deacon Barry said at the start of this Mass, it is only right that we give thanks for the elderly, the grandparents, and our senior citizens who have contributed so much both to our Church, and society throughout their long lives. Again, it's an opportunity for us to say '*thank you*' for *who they are* no matter their age. Together, we are all God's children, and members of the family of God.

And what a changing world these nonagenarians have lived through. Born in 1934, or earlier, they will have witnessed a World War, the falling away of the British Empire. The invention of the atomic bomb, and the jet engine. The founding of the NHS, and the Welfare State. Advances in communication from the telephone to the mobile smart phone. The early years of television with just one channel in black and white on a 6 inch screen, to huge colour televisions sets with umpteen channels, and not much to look at. Yes, they have witnessed so much change. No more so than in the Catholic Church. From the Latin Mass, to Vatican II, and the moving of the altars forward, and the liturgy of the Mass in English. They will have witnessed 7 popes or more.

Today, then, we give thanks for their long lives, and for their life stories that need to be heard before they are lost. Hopefully, after this Mass, the nonagenarians will come into the church hall, and, as well as enjoying the refreshments, hopefully they will share something of their lives with us.

Having grown up during the Second World War, they will know about the hardships the nation faced during those difficult, and dangerous years. Food was rationed, as well as clothing. It was a case of mend, and make do. Something that will have served them well throughout their lives.

A film that was released in 2018 had a peculiar name. It was called '*The Guernsey Literary and Potato Pie Society*.' The film reminded people of how resourceful people of Guernsey had to be because of the food shortages on the island during the Second World War. It showed how they managed to keep themselves alive with very little. People were grateful for whatever came their way. They quickly learned the value of "*enough*".

Hunger was ever present in Jesus' day. That is why certain *stories* from their past were so important to the Jewish people. Especially the story of *Moses*, who fed the people in the desert after their escape from slavery in Egypt. Naturally it was difficult for these Jews to accept that anyone could be greater than Moses. This, nevertheless is what the writer of St. John's Gospel sets out to demonstrate in today's Gospel reading. When Moses prayed, manna fell from heaven. Jesus, on the other hand, fed five thousand people from his own hand. And, whereas the manna quickly went mouldy, Jesus encouraged people to collect up every scrap of leftover bread. It would do for another day; it might feed someone else.

Conspicuous waste has become a scandal of our times, especially when much of the world's population still goes hungry. Unlike our *nonagenarians*, our generation needs to return to the lessons of the past – growing our own food, using up the leftovers, and making do. We have yet to appreciate, perhaps, how generous our God and Father has always been in feeding us from his hand, and how important it is to imitate his generosity in sharing our earth's resources.

An unknown author wrote this simple poem in praise of bread, an appreciation of this food of life.

*Be gentle when you touch bread.
 Let it not lie uncared for – unwanted.
 So often bread is taken for granted.
 There is much beauty in bread.
 Beauty of sun and soil.
 Beauty of patient toil.
 Winds and rain have caressed it.
 Christ often blessed it.
 Be gentle when you touch bread.*

In today's Gospel reading from Saint John, we see how Jesus blessed the bread. A large crowd of over 5000 Galileans had followed Jesus, impressed by both his teaching about the Kingdom of God, and his healing miracles. Anxious that he would not send them away hungry, Jesus asks Philip, who is from the locality, where food to feed them could be bought. Philip does some quick mental arithmetic, and calculates that even 6 month's wages wouldn't even make a dent in the food bill. It is now that Andrew has spotted a small boy who has five barley loaves and two fish, but this poor man's lunch doesn't appear to be much to share with so many people.

What the disciples have to learn is that Jesus is not only resourceful, he himself is the resource.

The disciples tell the people to sit down. Jesus *takes* the food the boy is willing to share. He then *gives* thanks to God for it. He *breaks* the bread. And he then *shares* the food to the waiting crowd. When everyone is satisfied, nothing is lost. The left overs are collected so that nothing is wasted.

Jesus' actions are directly related to what Jesus did when he shared the Passover meal at the Last Supper, with his disciples in that upper room. He took, blessed, broke and gave the bread to his disciples saying "*This is my body*". This is no longer the manna of the desert. He is now *the living bread* that brings eternal life. That is what we share at every Eucharist.

In today's Gospel reading we read how Jesus is happy to satisfy the hunger of the crowd by offering the bread of the poor. However, he is not happy to satisfy their hunger for power by agreeing to become their king. There are some hungers that Jesus refuses to satisfy. The hunger for domination is one of them. He is bread that is offered, is a lordship of care, that is a sign of God's ultimate reign when all will be fed. He rejects the lordship of domination and power, which he saw all around him.

The power that dominates with force, steals from the hungry multitudes. In saying "*No*" to the crowd who would make him king, Jesus gives us the model of Christian leadership. We must forever reject from being made in the image of secular power, because then it is free to offer itself to all the multitude. That is Jesus' challenge to all of us. Only when we share the little that we have, will be able to discover how much we have left over.

Today, we celebrate the lives of our nonagenarians. They know what it is to live under rationing. By growing up in a time of war with food shortages, and more, they know the importance of sharing the little they might have. They have learnt that a little can go a long way.

As I've said many times to you, *'there is enough in the world for our needs, but not for our greed.'* When we listen to the stories of our elderly, they have much to teach our modern world that is so hungry for power, material things, and self-interest. They know the **real bread** that satisfies our needs, and not that of our greed. It is Jesus, who said, ***"I am the bread of life."***

Reflection:

- *As the poem said, "So often bread is taken for granted".*
- *May we not take the Eucharist, the bread of life, for granted, who is the very means of our salvation.*
- *Be gentle when you touch such bread.*

Prayer:

Father, we thank you for the Eucharist, and that you are the bread of life that feeds us in our daily lives.

Help us to see that the law of Christ is true freedom.

We are free when we truly desire to be in your eternal presence, a presence of love.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**