

## **One Bread, One Body: Eucharist – the Family meal of the family of God**

*Sermon preached at St Andrew's Northwold Benefice 'Family' Mass 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2011.*

### **Readings:**

1 Cor 11: 23-26

Luke 24: 13-35

*+In Nomine*

Again a very warm welcome to our celebration of Holy Eucharist here at St Andrew's. It is a real delight to see our Norman school community so well represented – especially the choir and Danny and Nelson our two candle bearers who have joined young Adam from Feltwell as our altar serving team. It's especially appropriate to see all ages worshipping together this morning. All of us belong to a family. Within families our ages may range from new born to great grandparents and every age group in between. There is great diversity between the generations – from teens twittering on i-phones to those of riper years who remain more comfortable with pen and paper.

One of the most enduring aspects of family life is sharing meals together. Even though many of us succumb to the temptation of TV dinners at some point during the week, families do still come together for meals and conversation. At times of celebration – Christmas, birthdays, Easter for example many extended families gather to share food, laughter and conversation.

Today we come together as God's family and we share a special meal. Jesus was a bit of a party animal during his lifetime. He loved joining with his friends and family for meals and often accepted invitations to dinner at people's houses. Spending time with people over a meal was very important to Jesus. During those meals Jesus would often teach people a great deal about forgiveness, tolerance and inclusiveness. On the night before He died on the Cross, Jesus had dinner with his closest friends. During that meal, he

thanked God and he took and blessed bread and wine and gave it to his friends to eat. He told them that every time they met and ate together in the future, taking, blessing and eating bread and wine as he had done that night that he would be there – really there - with them. By doing this, Jesus gave us a means of coming together as His family, the Church. In this family meal of the Church, called Eucharist, which means thanksgiving, we thank God and celebrate all that Jesus did for us on the Cross in setting us free to follow Him. He invites us to share in His life's work to make God's love known to all people and we celebrate His promise that one day we will share eternal life with Him. In this morning's Gospel, Jesus' friends were leaving Jerusalem very sad that He had been killed. The risen Jesus walked alongside them, interpreted God's word to them, but they only recognized Him when he broke bread with them. The earliest Christians took Jesus at His word as they gathered together in their homes to break bread and to 'do this in remembrance of me'. When we join together as God's family, the Church, to celebrate this Family meal, we welcome the real presence of Jesus, our crucified, risen and glorified Lord, continuing His saving work among us. In the words of a popular hymn, Jesus comes to 'cleanse and heal and minister His grace', just as He did when he was alive and shared meals with his friends. As Christians we are united in our faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that God loves us so completely that in the words of St John's Gospel

*He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

Jesus died on the Cross to bring us together into right relationship with God. To be His family. To believe in God is to enter the 'we' of the family of God. Communion is a sign and seal of that union with God through Jesus, present in the breaking of bread and the cup of salvation. As St Paul says:

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

If we are to have such living communion with Christ, then he must be truly present, though in the mystery of his risen, glorified life in a way which is beyond our natural senses or understanding. So, we are made one with him and at-one with each other in him. At the end of St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus promised *to be with us to the end of the age*. As we recall the events of His death and resurrection, Jesus' saving work becomes powerfully present now as we share His presence in bread and wine. We also join our prayers with all God's Family in heaven and look forward to that day when all Creation will be finally made perfect in Him.

The Holy Eucharist is the most precious gift of Jesus to His church – His very self present here among us, binding us together as His family. Participating in the Holy Eucharist therefore is vital to our identity as the baptised people of God. It is the family meal of the family of God to which all the Baptised are invited. It isn't an optional extra and it can never be exclusive. Our Lord's invitation is an open one. It is not *Jesus* but *people* who seek to restrict access to the grace of His Eucharistic Presence. It is people, not Jesus, who say that Eucharist is only for the 'in group' and as such isn't inclusive and so misguidedly seek to replace Eucharist with a so called 'family service' which excludes communion in order to appear inclusive. Jesus is the Word made flesh who dwells among us. At the Holy Eucharist, Jesus is powerfully present and reveals Himself to us through *both* His Word in the Gospels and through His presence in the consecrated bread and wine. Both are necessary. The Lord's table is open to all Baptised Christians who believe and trust in Jesus. In it, we are nourished by the Body and Blood of Jesus himself in order to be knit together as His Body and carry His presence within us as we go out into our communities to live our daily lives in the power of His Holy Spirit.

So my friends. All is ready. Let us keep the feast as we gather together as one body around our Lord's table. Amen.