



20th Week of the Year - 18 August 2024
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Anyone who eats this bread will live forever”
(John 6:28)

You may have seen the TV reports this past weekend of the Funeral of one of 3 young girls murdered at a dance class in Southport. Alice da Silva, of Portuguese parentage, was a Catholic, and pictures of her showed her in her First Holy Communion Dress. The Priest spoke of the love that surrounded this young girl; it was a moving occasion, and of course points to a central gift often highlighted in our Catholic Faith: the gift of the living Bread that has come down from heaven, given by Jesus who said, as recorded in the Gospel for the 20th Sunday Year B *“Anyone who eats this Bread will live forever, and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.”* He went on to say: *“As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draws life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me.”* Many would not accept what he said, and we are told in the next section of John Chapter 6, which we will read next Sunday, that many of the followers of Jesus said *“This is intolerable language....After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him.”* Many cannot accept the *“real presence”* of Jesus in the Eucharist today, but there are those who do, and for them the joy of First Holy Communion Day fills parents and grandparents with happiness. In past months I have seen many posts on Facebook marking this Family Celebration; it is one of those occasions that parents, grandparents and children never forget.

In connection with this Sacrament I remember well a School visit to Rome when I was about 14. The Headteacher, a Vincentian Priest, celebrated Mass in St Peter’s at the Altar of Pope St Pius X. It was a special occasion, and I was one of those serving Mass. What I didn’t know then was that the Pope who is remembered and venerated at that Altar is the one who introduced the earlier age for First Holy Communion: the age of 7 when we are deemed to have reached the *“age of reason.”* Pope St Pius X’s Memorial is this coming week on 21 August. He was especially a pastoral Pope: coming from a working class family he experienced pastoral ministry at all levels in the Church. His special focus was on the foundations of pastoral life: formation of Catechists; participation in the Liturgy; and knowledge of the Scriptures. He recommended frequent, even daily Holy Communion, and First Holy Communion earlier for children.

Talking with a grandparent about upbringing grandchildren in our Faith recently, we spoke of how the whole family looked forward to the First Holy Communion, how much

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happiness it bought to them all; and then in another 2 years it would be the Sacrament of Confirmation!

This year, the year of the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress at Quito, Ecuador, we have a special resolve across the world to highlight the centrality of the Holy Eucharist, the Bread of Life, in our adult journey of Faith too. The Bishops' Conference website says Quito has a beautiful nickname – 'Carita de Dios' or 'Little Face of God' in English. It has four key strands:

- Wounded World
- Fraternity redeemed in Christ
- Eucharist and the transformation of the world
- For a Synodal Church
- Eucharist: Psalm of Fraternity

An International Eucharistic Congress aims to make known, love and serve Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic Mystery, the centre of our Catholic life and the heartbeat of our mission to heal the wounds of the world.

At a National level we have a Eucharistic Congress – "Adoremus at Oscott" on 14 September with representation of Dioceses across the country, coinciding with the International Congress at Quito 8-15 September. And on Sunday 15 September there will be "Adoremus in my Parish", when the Bishops invite all parishes to have a period of Exposition to unite the faithful focusing on the Eucharist in anticipation of the Jubilee Year with renewed and deepened devotion. This can be a Holy Hour or a period of prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Resources will be available to support this in due course.

Then there is a Day of Invocation at Adoremus, again at St Mary's, Oscott, on 15 September aimed at inviting young adults especially to reflect on how to follow Jesus, how to discern and embrace our vocation. The Day offers time and space as well as resources and accompaniment to embrace what God is asking of young adults in the Church today. It will be a day intrinsic to the Eucharistic Congress, and carry throughout the day themes focused on understanding, reverencing and celebrating the gift of the Eucharist in our Catholic lives.

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This is the Prayer of the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress:

Lord Jesus Christ.
living bread come down from heaven:
Look upon the people of your heart
who praise, worship and bless you today
As you gather us around your table
to feed us with your Body,
help us to overcome all division, hatred
and selfishness,
unite as true brothers and sisters,
children of the Heavenly Father.
Send us your Spirit of love,
so that walking in the ways of fraternity,
peace, dialogue and forgiveness
we may work together to heal the wounds
of the world.
Amen.

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