

## **The Lukan Symposium**

### *Monday week 31 in Ordinary Time*

The cluster of readings we are passing through at the moment is a collection of all the things Jesus said about eating together. One of the less fortunate facts about the life of the Parish Priest of St Hugh's is that, with the exception of Sunday Lunch at the Convent, he eats his meals alone. This is a form of solitary which I find rather hard to bear. But I suppose it does mean that I don't get a swollen appetite for sitting in the place of honour.

It's natural for human beings to share their food, and when the getting of food was the principal occupation of every day, we always did. Like every other important meeting, the way we assembled to share food spoke eloquently about the quality of life. Meals can express greed, indifference, and unkindness as few other occasions can. They can also express love, consideration, and sensitivity; and our religion is celebrated every day by the remembrance of a single meal which was the summit of human self-giving, and which bears within it the seeds of community. We strive all the time to be worthy to sit down at it. None of those who sat down at the Last Supper was worthy of its host. None could make him any return for the gift he would give them, and which "at that time, they did not understand".

This little selection of advice from Jesus would have been saved, not to make Christian meals a nicer experience, but precisely because it embodies the qualities that are needed for the proper celebration of the Eucharist. Today we are told that the guest-list should predominantly be made up of the people who bring with them no reward: the helpless and the powerless.

Perhaps we could ask ourselves whether, on this day (when we are privileged to take our place at his table) we have anything planned for the people we don't much like, who are a pure drain on our resources of sympathy, who do not figure on our Christmas-present list. Will today include a self-giving moment from us, to someone who will make us no return, even of gratitude, so that we feel better about ourselves?

It is no coincidence that the ancient superlative form of the English word *giving* is the word *forgiveness*. It is the height of goodness to be good to our enemy. This is a quality which could begin to make us worthy to take this broken bread, and share this loving cup.