

2020 THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

I was told a story a few years ago which has stuck in my mind ever since. I tell it to you today because it parallels an aspect of the Gospel we have just read.

Monica was a Year 13 student at a Catholic Secondary School in Auckland. She was a devout young lady and had a tender love for Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

In the Year 13 Common room this day a girl we will call Nadine was really letting loose about how she felt about the School and what she thought of the Principal in particular. She had been in constant trouble at the School over the previous four years and now things had come to a head. That morning she had been told by the Principal that because she was 18 the School had no obligation to educate her. She had been ordered by the Principal to leave the school and to go and do something with her life- like earning a living. She was expelled. And she was furious. Her language was colourful to say the least.

Monica doesn't know what prompted her to do so but she lifted from around her neck a little chain holding a medal of Mary Immaculate. She walked up to Nadine and without saying anything placed the medal in Nadine's hand.

The girls in the common room watched Monica do this and seemed stunned. One girl jeered, "Surely you don't believe in that stuff."

Yet Nadine accepted Monica's gift and grasped it tightly in her hand. She then left the common room without a further word.

For three years huge crowds had followed Jesus. But on this day Jesus went beyond being just a teller of good stories and an entertaining miracle worker. Suddenly He demanded belief from them. He demanded that they believe Him to be able to be present in consecrated bread and wine: "I am the Living Bread. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life and I shall raise that person up on the Last Day."

Like the girls in the Year 13 Common room, the crowds were stunned. Someone must surely have called out: "Come on- you don't expect us to believe such stuff."

And when they saw that Jesus was serious, most of them turned their backs and walked home in self-righteous disgust. What Jesus was now teaching seemed to be lunacy. As far as they were concerned, Jesus was

history. But a few stayed- believers- who were united with Peter when he said: "Lord, we don't understand what you are teaching but we believe that You have the words of eternal life." Many of them were like Mary Magdalene- people battered by life who had found in Jesus a light of hope.

I would see Nadine as a Mary Magdalene. Her cursing and terrible language in the common room were a sign of her sense of hopelessness.

It is entirely possible that as the Miraculous Medal was placed in her hand she had felt a warmth pulsing through her and known that she had a Mother, Mary, who loved her unconditionally helping her to face the future; knowing that Mary would always be beside her, interceding on her behalf.

Faith in Jesus, is all-important. At some stage in our lives all of us will ask ourselves- "Do I really believe Jesus teachings? Do I believe that He is really present in the Eucharist?"

On that day in Galilee Jesus refused to compromise on His teaching on the Eucharist; even though it meant losing most of His following. He did not run after them saying, "Come back, Come back- don't take things so literally. I was only speaking symbolically." Jesus didn't do this because He was not speaking symbolically.

A few weeks later Jesus would institute the Blessed Eucharist at the Last Supper. With the power of God within Him Jesus would say over the bread: "This is my Body". And over the chalice of wine He would say: "This chalice contains My Blood." And the apostles would remember the words that Jesus had spoken in today's Gospel: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in Me and I live in them." Receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus would bring an incredible closeness, unity and bonding for them with their Master- something we all share in when we come forward to receive Holy Communion.

When the Minister of the Eucharist says to you: "The Body of Christ" and then "The Blood of Christ", let your "Amen" be a heartfelt "Yes, I believe."

Sadly so many say of Holy Communion: "I don't believe in all that stuff." But when we ignore our objections and humbly accept the treasure God is giving us- as Nadine did that day in the Common room- our lives are transformed. If we have faith.