

## **The Inclusive Community**

**Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**August 16, 2009**

**Homily of Fred and Terry Quinn**

**God's Presence**

**John 6:51-58**

**Fred: I'd first like to tell a story told during the past year by Bishop Spong in his online newsletter. He related how he and his wife went to Vermont to visit his son and daughter-in-law and their twin grandchildren, as they do a few times during the year. He explained that the Episcopal church nearby is one of their favorites as it has a sensitive and understanding pastor and so they attend church there when they are visiting. However, the bishop's son and daughter-in-law do not attend church because as Spong explains it, ---- religion has little meaning in their lives. His daughter-in-law was particularly hurt in her dealings with the Roman Catholic church (this may sound familiar). However, the parents have no objection if the bishop and his wife take the twins to church with them, which they always do. They also took them to the altar to share in the Eucharist, which is done by intinction -- as we do. On this occasion the bishop's daughter-in-law decided to attend church with them. (It was right after Tim Russert's funeral) and the twins had just graduated from Kindergarten. The Bishop and his wife were happy that their daughter-in-law had decided to accompany them, as she had not been in a church since her wedding 7 years before. When it came time for Communion, the grandparents and the twins went up to the altar, but the little boy, Colin, did not understand why his mother was not going with them and yelled out, "Come on Momma." She was not ready to take this step and did not follow. When Colin's turn came, he just took a bite out of the bread and as the Bishop describes it ---- with resolute purpose ----- returned to his seat and fed his mother the other half. These are the Bishop's words---"I watched with tear-filled eyes, as my daughter-in-law received her first communion in years from the hands of her 5 year old son. The bishop also said that Colin doesn't know much about theology or ecclesiastical policy but " he does understand that no one is excluded from the Lord's table, especially those who, like his mother, have been hurt by ecclesiastical figures who want to limit God's welcome at God's table.**

Terry: When John in his gospel has Jesus uttering “I am” statements which are not present in the synoptic gospels, he is harkening back to the sayings and stories of the Hebrew bible, such as the revelation of the name “I Am” during the episode of the burning bush in the book of Exodus. Remember that John’s audience were followers of Jesus and also Jews.

As we have learned in our education sessions and readings, Jesus would not have called himself God, but certainly wished to reveal to his audience and to us that he and all of us are imbued with the divine spirit present in the first moments of creation. We remember that Jesus celebrated the first Eucharist at a Passover meal and that after his death, the sharing of the bread and wine became a way of remembering him. In fact, this is what I told the children when I prepared them for Communion during my convent years in the 60’s — it was a hard concept to teach and I didn’t want to cannibalize the Eucharist (as Marcus Borg puts it), but I did want them to know that they were sharing with Jesus -- just as the apostles and disciples did at the Last Supper and just as we do as we try to live our daily lives in the most inclusive and best way possible. St. Paul in 1 Corinthians tells us that he is handing on what he has received – that the Eucharistic community is the Body of Christ— the already formed community remembering Christ’s death and transformation. However, in the early church of Jerusalem, the first Christian communities ---- the community focused on the meal, a meal that they were celebrating with the risen Christ. They did not focus on the elements — the bread and wine, but on the divine presence in the community gathered together. Edward Schillebeekx talks of the importance of seeing Christ’s presence, not directed to the bread and wine, but toward the community.

So in reflecting on the story of Bishop Spong’s grandson we see that he knew something that perhaps the hierarchical churches have not learned --- that the bread of life is not life-giving because of a priest or a pope or any celebrant, nor do they decide to whom it is given. The bread of life becomes life-giving when it is shared and when the already existing body of Christ present in the celebrating community shares the bread and wine in remembrance of “Christ with us” — Jesus being the Incarnation not only of the Word of God, but the Wisdom of God — so to have “Christ with us” is to partake of his wisdom. ---- thus the members of the community (and the community need not be large, but can be just you and another person or a small group) --- become co-creators ready to express the spirit in new possibilities, the possibilities that spring up in our daily lives as we interact and share the Bread of Life with our spouses, our families, friends, the environment and all of creation.