

## Sermon, 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2012

### Feast of the Transfiguration

One day last year as I was preparing for our Service I dropped the box in which the people's hosts, those small round pieces of bread you receive when you come forward for communion, on the floor. I swept them up and placed them in the rubbish bin. When the first server arrived and being an observant lad he noticed there were a great number of hosts in the bin. Cheekily he chided me saying "That's not a reverent way to dispose of the breads, Father." The reference to reverent disposal of the breads comes because after the service the bread left in the ciborium, ie the vessel from which I place the host on your hand, is to be consumed in an orderly and reverent way, not left out, not thrown away, and not eaten up by servers as if they were pigs at a trough. The reason for this respect and reverence is that during the Thanksgiving Prayer, that part of the Service after the Greeting of Peace and during which we sing the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* (the Latin names for the "Holy, Holy, Holy" and "Blessed is he") the bells are rung, the thurible of incense swung, and the story of the relationship of God with his people summarised, the hosts as with the wine become by the invocation and power of the Holy Spirit special; how special is a theologically moot point.

At his last meal with his disciples on the night before he was arrested and after he had washed the feet of his disciples, the basis for the Headmaster washing the feet of the School Prefects, Jesus took the bread and the wine of the Passover meal, the great seal of the Jewish people's covenant with God and commanded his followers to consume bread and wine as the seal of a new covenant with God which was founded on the refreshment sustained by his body and blood. As such, for almost two thousand years, day in and day out, perhaps minute in and minute out, somewhere in the world people are gathering as we are this morning to participate and partake in this command Jesus left us.

I explained to the server that they were still just ordinary breads for I had spilt them before the Service and they had not been consecrated; therefore it was fine to put them in the bin. His somewhat flippant reply “Looks like the foot of Jesus to me, Father” conveyed a profound theological understanding far beyond flippancy. In making that statement he had indicated great understanding of what is the mystery of the Eucharist; indeed in the Orthodox Churches throughout the world they speak not of the Eucharist but of the Holy Mysteries. As the great early and eastern Mediterranean Christian Saint John Chrysostom wrote they are called mysteries because what we believe is not the same as what we see; instead, we see one thing and believe another. There is both the visible and invisible, an outward visible sign (bread and wine) with an inward spiritual grace (Body and Blood of Christ). As such humanity, ie each and every one of us, is able to participate mystically in the Divine Grace. Our server friend understood; in seeing the bread you believe in Christ.

Today’s Gospel reading from St Mark is another one of those “mystery” moments in the life of Jesus. As with the Eucharist it is a pivotal event in Christian teaching and understanding; here again humanity meets the divine. And again it is in the person Jesus Christ; here Jesus the man is identified as from God and in fact he is God’s mouthpiece on earth. So that the disciples might more fully comprehend this, Jesus is compared to Elijah and Moses, the great leaders of the Old Testament; they learn Jesus is greater; he is the voice of God “par excellence”.

I understand that what I have said this morning will not necessarily be easily grasped or understood. However, while the words read this morning from St Paul’s second letter to the people at Corinth “The God of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so they cannot see the light of the Gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” might ring true I am hopeful and confident that you as young men of this School are not blinded as St Paul says, for as with our unnamed server, the truth of the mystery of Christ has been and will continue to be revealed to you in this Holy Eucharist and many other ways when Christ speaks to and works through you.