

BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

In 1987 Jean Vanier was awarded a special medal of honour for his work with people with learning disabilities. The honour was called “Companion of the Order of Canada.” On the back of that medal there is an inscription in Latin, which reads *Desiderantes Meliorem Patriam* – “they desire a better country”. The medal reflects the great work and self-sacrifice of the recipient in spending their life in the service of others. The inscription is well-crafted. Jean Vanier does desire a better country. He wants to make this world a better place.

Jean Vanier’s early life involved him in the business of war. He was a trained naval officer. But he left the things of war and went in search of peace. That journey led him to a meeting with people with learning disabilities. That first meeting changed Vanier. He felt that he heard their scream, their desire for love. “Do you love me ? Am I lovable ? Have I any value ? Why have I been abandoned ?” Vanier bought a house and invited two people with disabilities to join him. This was the beginning of the organization called “L’Arche” or “The Ark”.

In the course of living with people with disabilities, Vanier has grown in his own life and understanding. Instead of climbing up the ladder of success, Vanier discovered the way of going down the ladder to be with people who have often experienced brokenness and pain. In this meeting Vanier discovered his own brokenness and hardness of heart. In wanting to help others, Vanier was helped and healed himself. He is blessed and broken.

Reflecting on his whole experience, Vanier says that society can only be truly human when it is founded on welcome and respect for the weak and the downtrodden. It is by the mutual gift of attention and love that we will make the world a better place.

When the crowds follow Jesus into the hillsides of Galilee, they are hungry for a better place and a better life. Luke tells us that Jesus begins by welcoming them. This first kindness is followed by conversation about the kingdom of God, and by the healing of the sick. This is the very same as our formula at Mass, where we are welcomed together, where we confess our brokenness, and where we are inspired by the reading of the Word of God.

Then, as the day grows late, Jesus feeds the crowd. His disciples have pointed out, in a telling phrase, the nature of this world. “This is a lonely

place,” they say. Not only the hills of Galilee, but the streets of our modern world are indeed a lonely place, and people go hungry for food, material and spiritual, every day. Jesus instructs his disciples to organize a dinner. With the little that they have, the disciples discover that they have fed the crowd, and that there are scraps left over. The food has been blessed and broken and shared. No one goes hungry.

This is the world that Jesus creates, a Eucharistic world. He teaches us to give thanks to God for all we have. We break our bread and we share it with everyone, especially with the starving poor. We exclude no one. There is plenty for us all.

The Christians in Corinth needed to learn that lesson, when they were excluding those who were poor, and enjoying comfortable meals themselves. Paul reminds them of what he had learned from the Lord about the meaning of the Eucharist. Bread and wine, blessed and broken, body of the Lord, given for all. Every time we take part in the Eucharist, we are joining in the suffering and death of Jesus, the rich one who became poor for our sake. We are going down into the poverty and suffering of this world in order to be raised up together with the Lord.

This way of life is open to us all: to live the Eucharist, the life of thanksgiving love. This life involves us with those who suffer. You may be called to share your life with people who are sick and old, or with people out of work, or with people caught in the world of drugs. You may be with people who are terribly angry because of the hurt they suffered when they were young. There are so many hungry and suffering people, lost people. They say of life, “This is a lonely place.” And in reply the Lord says to you, “Give them something to eat yourselves.”