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**Sharing the Joys and Sorrows of All Humanity**

Last Thursday, for a few joyous minutes, this space (the Labyrinth), became a dance floor. Then, for more than two hours, our beautiful church echoed to the sounds of singing, music, storytelling, dressing up, manipulation of props, letter reading, laughter, and applause. And everyone left with a smile on their faces; including the paramedics who were called to assist a member of the audience; when they posed for a photo with Jimmy Cricket.

When saying goodbye I said what a gift he has to bring a smile to people’s faces. He replied that he felt very privileged to bring a little happiness to others as he understood that every life has its woes and troubles.

I mention all of this not to make those who weren’t here jealous; but because it allows me to share something with you that I have known to be true for a long time. A church community at its best is one that finds ways to help each other deal with our joys and sorrows and never feel alone or uncared for.

This is nothing revolutionary. The Second Vatican Council said that the very purpose of the Church is to be responsive to:

*The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted.*

In fact we are not only responsive but because we are a community made up of human beings: the joys and hopes of others: *are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in our hearts*.

This has been given a new impetus by Pope Francis. Even before he was elected as Pope he told his fellow cardinals that

“The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only in the geographical sense but also to go to the existential peripheries: those of the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and of religious indifference, of thought, of all misery.”

This has remained the central focus of his ministry. He has urged us to live the Joy of the Gospel, he has given voice to the most marginalised and poorest communities, he has enabled the church to reach out to families of all shapes and sizes with greater understanding; setting aside judge-mental attitudes to those who have previously been defined as disordered in their affections.

So far I have made no explicit reference to the readings, but they are shot through with the idea of a God who reaches out to people in every circumstance. The God who lifts the mourning veil and discards the shrouds of death, the God who is host at a banquet of rich food. The Shepherd who guides along the right path and under whose watch we need not fear. The same image is on display in the king who opens the doors of the wedding feast to all comers, especially those who might have missed out on an earlier invitation.

This is the God we encounter in every Eucharist.

As I was writing my description of the Jimmy Cricket Show it occurred to me that every Eucharistic liturgy could be described in similar language, so to remind you that I said: our beautiful church echoed to the sounds of singing, music, storytelling, dressing up (vestments), manipulation of props (sacramental signs), letter reading, laughter (occasionally), and applause (very rarely). And everyone left with a smile on their faces; at least that is our hope.

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