

## Homily 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B 5<sup>th</sup> August 2018

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The 20th century Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner said that in the future all Christians would be mystics. Rahner went on to describe a mystical experience as a 'God moment'. What puzzled me about Rahner's statement was this idea of a mystical experience, a God moment. What did he mean? Did he mean that we would have some kind of vision or extraordinary experience? No, on the contrary when Rahner referred to a mystic he was not referring to a person sitting in a cave on a high mountain saying 'om'; no he was referring to someone totally engaged with God in their everyday life. Such a person would have experienced a God moment or moments when they encountered Christ in the everyday an encounter with the creator God in His creation. In Rahner's view to be Christian you must have encountered Christ. We might encounter Christ while reflecting on the Gospel, a Homily, in an Alpha group, or in any of the many ways Christ reaches out to touch our lives. But Rahner's point is to be a Christian I must have encountered Christ and responded to that encounter. To be Christian I must be totally engaged with Christ in my

life and the only way for that to occur is for me to encounter Christ.

This need for total engagement reminded me of a story one of my lecturers told about the Japanese car industry. In the 1950's the Japanese car industry was struggling with quality assurance. They had looked at what the British and American experts had written on the subject and found their recommendations difficult to implement. The Japanese engineers decided to visit a small German family owned sports car manufacturer, Porsche. Porsche was in a similar position to the Japanese manufacturers who were struggling to rebuild after the ravages of World War 2. But, unlike the Japanese manufacturers whose cars were considered unreliable and copies of pre-war British cars, Porsche cars were considered state of the art and well-engineered. When the Japanese engineers arrived they were given a complete tour of the Porsche works. At the end of the tour the Japanese engineers asked: Have we had a complete tour of your plant? Yes was the answer. Then an indignant Japanese engineer asked: Why have you not shown us your quality assurance section? Is it secret? The Porsche engineer smiled and pointed at a completed gearbox and simply

said everybody is responsible for quality. If you work for Porsche you are responsible. It does not matter if you are the chief designer or the new apprentice you are responsible. He then showed the visitors the initials stamped in the side of the gearbox. These are the people who built this gearbox. It's their gearbox. The Porsche engineer then explained that the company despite the tough times was totally committed to the welfare of every one of their workers and in turn their workers were totally committed to Porsche. The message was not lost on the Japanese engineers and the rest as they say is history.

In today's readings 'engagement' is expressed almost as an evolution of ideas. The first reading from Exodus speaks of God feeding His people, Israel with 'manna from Heaven'. The engagement in this reading at first glance appears very one sided. The people complain they are starving and God feeds them. But what if I see not as the action of a God silencing a whining mob but the action of a God moved to pity by the cries of his people. In the second reading St Paul urges me not to live an aimless life but renew my mind with the message of Christ. So St Paul describes my engagement with Christ in terms of personal renewal.

St Paul challenges me to move beyond praying to God for some outcome, to being part of the outcome. Unlike the Israelites in the first reading who ate the bread to survive I am called to become what I eat. Like the workers in the Porsche factory were totally committed to Porsche, I am called to be totally committed to my life in Christ. In today's Gospel reading from the fourth chapter of St John, Jesus is confronted by a crowd of people who have followed Him after He fed them at the "miracle of the loaves and fish" which we read about last week. Jesus realises that they are only following Him because he fed them. This is quite understandable as feeding a family would have been a day to day struggle in Jesus's time as it is for many people today and the prospect of another free meal would have been incentive enough for the crowd to seek out Jesus. But Jesus tells-them-off, He is almost angry with them for missing the point. Life is not about the temporal things, necessary as they are, life is about the eternal. Jesus says; "work for food that endures to eternal life". While I immediately associate Jesus words in this chapter of John as referring to the Eucharist. The words have an underlying message that would have been understood

by the crowd and yet puzzled them. The crowd would have known that Jewish Prophets had a long standing tradition of literally eating the words of God. In Ezekiel 3:3 we read: "He said, "Mortal man, eat this scroll that I give you; fill your stomach with it." I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey." Likewise in Jeremiah (15:16) we read: "Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God of Hosts." The crowd would have been puzzled here is a prophet who is asking us to eat him! How can this be? Unlike the crowd, with the gift of years the Church's teaching I understand what Jesus message is; eat the bread which is my body and like prophets of old make it part of your very being and you will enjoy eternal life.

Jesus' message is very clear I must encounter God who is actively seeking me in the everyday. Through the gift of the Eucharist I must make God part of the very fabric of my being. Finally I must engage with God's creation, God's people. In the words of St Agustin: "Become what you receive". I must be Christlike. I am called to be a mystic, one who; Encounters Christ in the everyday; through the Eucharist makes Christ the very fabric of being; is Christlike in the world.