



Friday 9.30am Holy Eucharist Lent III 2021

The readings in Lent are so wonderfully *joined up*. Selections like today's show the genius of the Lectionary as a friend and fellow pilgrim as we meander through life.

Today the prophecy of Hosea blossoms. The Lord calls us home to find, if we dwell with Him, that we will blossom like the Lily, watered by His presence as refreshing as dew, the beauty of the olive, and the fragrance of Lebanon's exotic perfumes. In peaceful shade and delicious wine, fruitfulness and wisdom dwell here. Maybe it's because we haven't had a foreign holiday and are simply *dying* to lounge on a sundrenched patio swathed in vines, well at least I am...

These images, however evocative and life-giving are simply that. They will be far, far outstripped by the reality of the life and love and fullness we will possess when God possesses us fully and we Him in the presence of His glory.

And *presence* is at the heart of both of today's readings. Hosea is not prophesying of a prize that is to be won, it is a presence to be dwelt in, swept up in. The beauty of these realities isn't an experience that is bought, or a reward for good behaviour, it is simply what *is* when we return to God and dwell in Him.

So too with Jesus today. The wisdom of the scribe in today's Gospel in properly understanding the heart of right relationship with God and creation means that He is not far from the Kingdom. His proximity to

God's Kingdom, God's life, is the *indicator*, but also the *means* and *fruit* of his right thinking.

Does that make sense?

It all joins up, of course it does.

So, we are journeying into God's presence now. 1. Each day of our lives is a step on that pilgrim path. 2. Lent is a particularly concentrated expression of our journey as we immerse ourselves deeply in the mysteries of the Lord's Passion, death and Resurrection – we are drawing near now, it's already Lent III. 3. Also, as we prepare to celebrate this Eucharist, we prepare to be as close to God as it is possible to be on this side of death – to be at the cross on Calvary, to be on the threshold of Heaven's banquet, to take His life into our bodies so that His blood infuses ours with grace, His flesh nourishes and becomes part of our flesh and life. We now, in all these three ways and more, we are not far from the Kingdom of God.

We are here on purpose, we live Lent on purpose, we are called to live each day on purpose. The purpose of doing as Hosea says: to return to the Lord and dwell in His courts, His sun drenched veranda if you like, overflowing with life.

And it is very simple. Strengthened by the grace of this Eucharist we are called afresh to Love and be Loved with every part of ourselves: heart, soul, mind, strength. To discover what it means to really be loved by God and to love Him back. And to love ourselves, so that as we love our neighbours *as* ourselves, it is a love worth receiving.

And, returning to *presence*: we cannot summon love, or force love. It is simply that the more we dwell in God, who *is* love, the more we will love and be loved. The more love will become the reality of ourselves and our surroundings. Just as the sunshine of my dream-veranda is natural and abundant and life-giving and unstoppable and unsummon-

able, so love will imbue everything, if we dwell in God's presence. So let us come back to the Lord our God, his Kingdom is near.