



For many years now, I have treasured this bookmark. It has these words on it: 'You are to be taken, blessed, broken, distributed that the work of the incarnation may go forward.' The more I reflect on my life and ministry as a priest, the more these words resonate with me: 'You are to be taken, blessed, broken and distributed that the work of the incarnation may go forward.'

The quotation is taken from an Easter sermon preached by Saint Augustine of Hippo, a fourth century bishop in North Africa. He was preaching against the background of the sacking of Rome. Saint Augustine said, 'You are the body of Christ. In you and through you the work of the incarnation must go forward. You are to be taken; you are to be blessed, broken, and distributed; that you may be the means of grace and the vehicles of eternal charity.'

When the Bishop introduced this service, he used these words, 'The Church is the Body of Christ, the people of God and the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit.'

We are the body of Christ. We are to be taken, blessed, broken and distributed that the work of the incarnation may go forward. We are to be the means of grace and the vehicles of eternal charity. We are to be God's love, alive and active in the world today.

In the declarations, the Bishop says that priests are to proclaim the word of the Lord, they are to be messengers, they are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God.

We heard in the reading from Isaiah, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Our God reigns."'

But, have you ever stopped to think about the state of the feet of those messengers? In Isaiah's context, that of the Ancient Near East, the feet of those messengers, after a long journey over the mountains, would be not only dusty but also very callused and maybe even bleeding. Yet such feet

are beautiful because they bring good news, news which thrills the hearts of those who have been longing for it.

These dirty, callused, bruised and bleeding feet, these broken feet are beautiful. It's like an old woman peering into the still sparkling eyes of her ninety year old husband, eyes which are surrounded by wrinkles, enfolding the wisdom of a thousand revelations. It's like a loving husband stroking the stomach of the mother of his children, gently tracing the stretch marks that witness to maternal labour. This is the language of the Song of Songs. This is the language of love.

Isaiah is addressing the people of Israel when they are in exile, far from home, in a foreign land, governed by a mighty power, yearning to return home. And indeed they are about to return from Babylon to Jerusalem. The messenger with broken and beautiful feet brings good news. News that God is in the midst of the people, God is with us, Emmanuel. And this God reigns. In the midst of pain and suffering, in the midst of chaos and uncertainty, in the midst of brokenness, God is present and God reigns.

We love to proclaim good news when we are taken, when we are called, when we are chosen. We love to proclaim good news when we are blessed, when we are happy, when all is well. But we also need to proclaim good news when the city is being sacked, when we are in exile, when we are suffering, when we are sad, when we are broken. Priests are to preach the word in season and out of season. In the midst of hardships, Isaiah's community experiences the transformation of despair and brokenness into faith and hope. This transformation occurs, not by the faithful being elevated above their hardships, but right in the midst of life, as the faithful become agents of God's grace and witness to how the broken shall obtain joy and gladness.

As Rome was sacked, Augustine called the faithful to be the means of grace and the vehicles of eternal charity. He called Christians, the body of Christ, to incarnate, to embody, to live God's love.

Kahlil Gibran, the Lebanese-American artist and philosopher, wrote in his book *The Prophet*, 'Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be? The deeper that sorrow carves in your being, the more you can contain... Is not the cup that holds your wine, the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?'

Picture a bowl in your mind's eye, maybe a wooden fruit bowl. The deeper that bowl is, the more fruit it can contain. Picture your soul as a bowl, the deeper your soul is carved out by sorrow, the more it can be filled with joy. You see how sorrow and joy are inseparable?

And it is joy that lies at the heart of the gospel. Joy is a constituent of the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians (Gal. 5:22). The Philippians are urged to 'Rejoice in the Lord always' (Phil. 4:4). And the Thessalonians to 'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.'

Oliver, Heather, Darren, Matt, Tom, David and Karen, I urge you to pray continually. Pray in sorrow and in joy. Pray in blessing and in brokenness. Face everything with prayer. Always live in the spirit of prayer.

There are lots of ways to pray, prayer techniques, prayer resources and aids to prayer. But ultimately it is through taking time to be with God, through attending to God, through gaining an increasing awareness of God, that we are transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Pope John Paul II wrote, 'Beware of spending too much time doing the work of the Lord without spending enough time with the Lord of the work.'

Your relationship with Jesus is key to your ministry. I encourage you to spend time in prayerful adoration of him. As Saint Clare told Agnes of Prague, 'gaze on the crucified Christ, consider him, contemplate him as you desire to imitate him.'

Prayer is like breathing, we cannot live without it, the body of Christ cannot survive without it. Prayer is a way of acknowledging our utter dependence on God.

After the declarations, the Bishop will remind you that, 'You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your heart may be daily enlarged and your understanding of the scriptures enlightened... Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing and to give thanks in all circumstances.

Without the Holy Spirit we become fearful and hide ourselves away like the disciples in the reading from John's gospel. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot forgive sins. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot do as Jesus did. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot live God's love. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot be the means of grace and the vehicles of eternal charity.

With the Holy Spirit we become fearless and bold in proclaiming the gospel. With the Holy Spirit we can forgive sins. With the Holy Spirit we can do as Jesus did. With the Holy Spirit we can live God's love. With the Holy Spirit we can be the means of grace and vehicles of eternal charity.

So, pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Oliver, Heather, Darren, Matt, Tom, David and Karen, as you are ordained priest and prepare to preside over the Eucharist for the first time, that most amazing gift of God, take time to pray, pause before taking the elements of bread and wine, pause before seeking God's blessing, pause before breaking the bread, and pause before distributing the body and blood of Christ.

As you preside over this most holy meal, allow God to take you, to bless you, to break you, and to distribute you that the work of the incarnation may go forward.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.