

On Friday the school heard an excellent talk about dihydrogen monoxide at hymn practice, more commonly known as water. Some students will be spending the next few days thinking about the wettest of elements, a substance that supports human life both physical and spiritual; and all the religions agree. To mix things up a little in water week, I offer some thoughts about the spirituality of food.

Jesus famously responded to the evil one who tried to tempt Him while fasting. Jesus said: *man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*. Bread is a universal term for any kind of food; in England *bread-and-butter* describes everyday, not-too-special belly-filling fodder. Thank goodness we've got bread-and-butter here in Somerset too, and jam. Mouthwatering thoughts of a thick slice of oven-baked fresh bread, lashings of Lurpak™ and a dollop of raspberry preserve may make our tummies rumble, especially if we missed breakfast. But what of our souls? Are they rumbling? A pedantic person might retort; no, my soul is immaterial not physical. Even pedants have a soul, if not an imagination. But can you imagine a huge spread of food and how you might help dispose of the evidence?

We readily relate to a rumbling tummy, like St Paul's in the second reading. Paul says: *full stomach or empty stomach, poverty or plenty, there is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength*. All the readings relate how our deepest hunger might be satisfied by the spread of goodies laid out by God. In the first reading Isaiah told us about the mountain of the Lord where a rich banquet of fine wines with rich and juicy food has been prepared. On this mountain, those gathered move forever beyond worldly struggles. Rejoicing in God's presence, they behold the God of their salvation. It all sounds very fulfilling.

In the Psalm we are guided through fresh pastures, restful waters to the Lord's own house where a banquet has been prepared for me and you. There we shall dwell for ever and ever. Out-of-this-world.

And, in the gospel we're all invited to the King's house for his son's wedding, a huge feast. We know what happens at weddings when Jesus is involved, think of the marriage of Cana, when the wine ran out, and water was turned into wine at Our Lady's request. At the wedding described in the gospel, supplies of food and wine were not a problem; if turkey is a Christmas favourite in the UK, fattened cattle were the festive delicacy in Jesus' time, and the butcher had delivered to the palace. But no one wanted to attend the King's party to celebrate the son's

wedding. The king's servants were sent, some of whom were killed, and still the invitees stayed away. Decoding the parable, the King is God the Father, the son is Jesus, and the wedding banquet is the joy of heaven. The servants being sent are members of the Church, perhaps you and I who witness to the will of the Father, in the name of His Son, inspired to evangelise through our words and example. Servants such as Downside's own saints, who were martyred in this country by inviting everyone to His table. The good news is that everyone is invited to the most wonderful opportunity known to mankind. Scripture calls it the wedding feast of the Lamb. In other words, heaven.

If you're feeling hungry and thirsty after so many mentions of rich food, or fine wine, remember to obey your hunger. An advert for Sprite, the fizzy liquid, urged the market to *obey their thirst*. I think the Lord is telling us this Sunday to obey your hunger, to find food for your soul, and to realise the Lord is constantly shepherding you closer to him and to his house for ever and ever. A book I read a few pages of each week has the title "Food for the Soul" by Peter Kreeft. In it he explains that: *there are more genuine hungers than hunger for food. There is, above all, the hunger for love and the hunger for truth. We must feed those heart-hungers as well as stomach-hungers.*

In the Mass, *Jesus has given us his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, to us to eat, to receive into our souls and bodies in the Eucharist. It's not just a ceremony or a symbol or a remembrance of Jesus; it's Jesus himself, in person. When you eat other food, the food is gradually changed into you. When you eat Christ, you are gradually changed into Him.*

Dear brothers and sisters, Our Father is forever inviting us to move beyond the bread-and-butter ordinariness of everyday life. R.S.V.P Him today and say a big yes to his kindness. Take the opportunity to feed the hungry in body as well as spiritually through service in the St Teresa's community, assisting Mary's Meals. Read the invitation to come to the Abbey Church early on Friday morning, up the 38 steps – as if climbing Isaiah's mountain – where the paschal banquet of the Mass awaits you. Realise that our hunger goes beyond our bellies and bodies. The last invitation to a banquet I received was for the music scholar's dinner last Thursday in the Petre cloister, what a foretaste of heaven that was. The sung words of the grace that evening are my final words as we prepare to receive Jesus at the altar: *God we thank you for this food, for rest and home and all things good, for wind and rain and sun above, but most of all, for those we love.* Thank you Lord. Amen.