

How can we be people of the Eucharist if there is no Eucharist?

From Monday May 11 to Wednesday May 13, 2020, a small group of Columban companions represented by myself, Josefa Vasakula (National Coordinator) and Lay Missionary Jennifer (Jake) Lunor led a workshop, in Fijian, on the meaning of the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist, given that we are in a time when the vast majority of Catholics are being denied access to Mass, except online. The ideas for the seminar were prepared by a liturgist Sr Carmel Pilcher, who had given input to our two Spiritual Year students a few weeks previously.

We learnt that 'liturgy' originally meant 'work of the people' (in civil society), and obviously now means our sacred priestly work as the baptised in offering our thanks to God and our service to the community, especially the poor. We recalled Vatican II's famous statement: '*The Liturgy is the summit toward which the Church is directed At the same time it is the source from which all the Church's power flows*' (CSL 10) and asked the villagers to share about the importance of their own water source and to think about why their elders had picked that particular summit to build their church on.

We also recalled that Christ is present in the liturgy in four equal ways:

1. In the assembly (community) gathered in his name.
2. In the person of the minister (the priest or his delegate).
3. In his Word.
4. Under the species of bread and wine (*GIRM 27*).

At this time of COVID-19, although we do not have the Eucharistic species being shared, or the priest presiding, we still have vibrant family communities who share the word of God together, so in no sense has Christ withdrawn from his Church. In fact this may be a graced time for us to re-emphasise those aspects of the liturgy which were underestimated in our emphasis on the role of the priest, and/or the fact of simply 'receiving communion'.

In our second session, we looked at the meaning of Christian sacrifice (given the Mass is often called 'the Holy Sacrifice'). As opposed to people "sacrificing" chocolate in order to lose weight or save money, Christian sacrifice is always a loving act for someone else and it is all those acts



18 Early morning view of Doguru village.
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that we bring to Mass every Sunday. These loving acts are gathered up in Christ's supreme act of offering himself to the Father and to us. Our loving acts – especially those on the front line of caring and healing - have not stopped in the time of COVID, in fact they have intensified.

In the final session, *'Bread Broken and Shared'*, we remembered Pope Benedict XVI's phrase 'Love for the poor and liturgy go hand in hand. Love for the poor is liturgy.' In fact, *"Only from the Eucharist, from the prophetic gesture of the breaking of the bread, can the Christian communities renew their awareness that the church cannot be the body of Christ where Christians fail to turn away from egoism and refuse to share their goods with the poor. That which is not shared with others in communion is taken from others in injustice"*. (Boselli: *Spiritual Meaning of Sacrifice*, 205-6)

The villagers of Doguru were very grateful for this time of renewal, and although we could only accommodate 15 people because of restrictions and neither could we celebrate the Eucharist, they were empowered to carry the teaching to their own communities, so that when Mass does resume, we will hopefully all think and act differently

about it. We will leave the last word to St Augustine (from a sermon to the newly baptised): *"If you are the body of Christ and His members, your mystery has been placed on the Lord's table, you receive your mystery. You reply "Amen" to that which you are. ...Be a member of the body of Christ so that your "Amen" may be true!"*

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