

## EASTER VIGIL

Isak Dinesen's short story, 'Babette's Feast,' is the story of a French woman whose husband and son were killed in the Franco-Prussian War, who became a cook for two sisters whose father had founded a very strict puritanical sect, whose members ate frugally, were rather joyless, and absolutely rigid in their morals, disdaining the frivolity of worldly pleasures.

Babette cared for them uncomplainingly for 14 years without payment, but unknown to her, a friend in Paris bought a weekly lotto ticket in her name. She won and so became very rich. The sisters expected her to leave them, but she offered to cook a real French meal for them and their sect members to celebrate the centenary of their father's birth. The sisters resisted, but eventually agreed, vowing to eat virtually nothing of the meal.

The meal was prepared and having sampled the fine wine and gourmet food, things loosened up somewhat. Out of Babette's wild generosity, friendships were restored, wounds healed, forgiveness and reconciliation were experienced and the walls of unspoken resentment festering beneath the veneer of pious religiosity were smashed. Mercy and Truth met together in this feast. What in fact took place was a little resurrection. Life began to be lived on a new level, not only for the guests but also for the generations to come.

Jesus' disciples had shared a meal with Him on the night before He died, but it took them a little while before they realised its significance. That meal in the Upper Room had a sense of finality about it. The disciples were confused, somewhat joyless, huddling together for support and protection. God seemed to be incomprehensible. He had given them hope only to smash it. But on the third day, they too experienced a resurrection after which not only their lives, but also the lives of every generation that succeeded them, would never be the same again.

The risen Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples in the Upper room, to Thomas, on the Road to Emmaus and by the seashore where the disciples were fishing. In all these situations Jesus was present but unrecognised, and it was the moment of recognition that brought them great joy. This was the beginning of life at a higher level – eternal life. They began to understand that if Jesus had been raised, He must be God's chosen Messiah. Therefore, everything He said and did must be of God and the cruel shame of the Cross was in fact the way to life for those who recognised God's glory shining from it.

For those early disciples, as with Babette's guests, this new life was linked to a meal. It was the last meal Jesus had during which He told His disciples to love and serve each other, to eat the bread and drink from the cup, His Body and Blood, in remembrance of Him and give thanks for the new life He was to offer them through His impending death and resurrection.

In this Easter Vigil liturgy the story of the salvation of God's people is recalled so that we can understand the story that is ours, for we are now Christ's body on earth. This story leads us to a shared meal in which we rejoice that our salvation has been secured. In re-presenting Jesus' sacrifice in the Mass, we also share the benefits He won for us, namely the gift of eternal life which we are able to live in the here and now.

In sharing in this meal, we are sharing in a Babette-like feast. We must be open to our lives never being the same again as we live in trust, grow God's kingdom while waiting in hope of sharing in the great heavenly banquet that Jesus promised to all who persevere to the end. This evening, we welcome Iroam into the fellowship of all believers through Baptism and Confirmation and then to share in the heavenly feast of Our Lord's precious Body and Blood for the first time.

A blessed, happy and holy Easter to you all. Enjoy the feast and embrace your new life.

*Msgr Harry Entwistle*

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