

Living Sacramentally

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When we hear the word ‘sacrament’ we might think of those rituals and ceremonies, rich in symbolism and deep in meaning, that happen in a church or occasionally by a bedside. These rituals mark in word and symbol significant moments in our lives when we want to name and celebrate God’s presence with us.

For most of us though most of our lives is lived outside such significant moments. It could be said that most of our lives is the ‘living out’ of these very moments in the ordinary experiences of our every day.

“God comes to us disguised as our lives” wrote the late Daniel O’Leary. It is within the sacrament of our everyday experience that our God is revealed to us.

We baptise our babies, welcoming them into the loving and life-giving community of family and church. And the loving and the giving of life happens at the bath-times and the bed-times and the getting the homework done right through to the testing-the- boundaries teenagers.

We make our commitments – for better and for worse – and spend the rest of our lives living these every day, through all the joys and sorrows, the giving and receiving that come with being given to another. From the occasions of celebration, to the testing of trust, to the stresses and strains that come with every dynamic relationship – this is where a commitment is ‘made flesh’.

We celebrate God’s forgiveness and live this in the patient forbearance and humble apologies we experience every day. In the seemingly mundane ordinary moments, the irritations and annoyances, the “rubs” of relating – this is where the accepting and forgiving become real.

We are fed from the Eucharistic table and go out to live lives of Eucharist. We give ourselves to be broken and shared in our love and living for and with our families, our friends, the world outside ourselves. When we cook yet another meal, hang out one more load of washing, get up in the night to a sleepless child – this is our self-giving. The grand gestures may be all very well, but it’s in the warp and the weft of every Sunday right through to the next Saturday that the real and constant giving, the real ‘eucharisting’ happens.

We take a walk in the park and delight in the magpies’ carolling and the tossing branches of the graceful gum trees; we are greeted with a smile from our neighbour or receive an unexpected email from an old friend; a courteous driver stops to let us into the stream of traffic; we are greeted with kindness and care when we join the queue in the doctor’s waiting room... A myriad of ‘small’ moments such as these can be moments of revelation for us wherein we glimpse, however fleetingly, that there is a depth, a mysterious life, within and beyond such seemingly ordinary encounters. And we can be grateful.

Perhaps “sacrament” should be a verb whereby we are “sacrament-ing” in each of those moments where we meet this God at the heart of all life. Where, as the poet E E Cummings expresses it

“the ears of my ears awake and
[and] the eyes of my eyes are opened”.