

## Reflection for November – The Soup and the Stone

Many years ago, in our parish we introduced a course for First Communion children, which was one of the first to bring parents and children together. They came together, but were in separate groups. It was written by a lady called Christiane Brusselmans. Parents weren't happy that they were expected to attend. Many didn't know each other and many did not attend Church on Sunday.

The first time we gathered in the school hall the atmosphere was electric. The first 'talk' or input was *"Belonging"*. I told my story and then they shared with each other and as the time moved on there were people in tears, hugging each other and from that time we were a group, a family, a Eucharistic Community and most of them are still part of our parish today.

There is a story of a village, just an ordinary place, but where people tended to keep themselves to themselves and as we used to say, *'minded their own business'*. Times had not been easy, the harvest had not been good and not many strangers ever visited. One day, however, a stranger came, he looked poor too. He stopped at the first person he saw and asked her if she, or anyone else, would be willing to give him something to eat? He had been travelling all day. He was told that there was no spare food, it was hard enough to feed our own children let alone strangers, perhaps he should try somewhere else. The man looked at those who had gathered to see what was going on. *"Goodness"*, he said, *"I didn't realise you were all poor, maybe there's something I can do for you instead."* People laughed at him, *"You've just been begging from us and now you want to give to us, what could you possibly have we could want?"*

*"Well,"* he replied, *"I could make some soup."* One of the villagers asked him how he was going to do that? He said that he was going to need help. *"What kind of help?"* they asked him suspiciously. All he asked for was a pot. That was easy, so one appeared. Next some children brought some firewood and one of the men brought a bucket of water. *"That's great,"* he said, *"that's all we need."* They were a bit taken aback. *"How can that be all you need to provide soup?"* *"Don't worry,"* he replied, *"that's really all I need, along with my magic stone of course"*, which he then produced from his pocket.

More people were gathering around to see what was happening. He took the stone and dropped it into the water, everyone drew closer, the idea of some free soup was not to be missed. After a bit a woman nearby asked if he would need to add some salt and pepper? *"Yes,"* he replied, *"that's a good idea, thank for the offer."* And salt and pepper appeared. *"That's great,"* replied the man, *"a huge bonus to the soup, I remember that last time I did this, someone found a turnip to add."* *"I've got a spare turnip."* said an elderly man behind him, another offered an onion, another a carrot, they asked if he wanted them also. *"Well,"* replied the stranger, *"we don't really want to spoil the taste of the stone, but it would be rude of me to refuse your generosity, so yes, lets just put them in. Thank you all for the offers."*

The people came alive, suddenly all were running around to find things to put into the pot, vegetables, herbs, and then they began to talk and laugh together as they sat down and waited to be fed. Suddenly someone shouted out, *"This is going to be the best soup ever, what can we stir it with?"* A lady stood up, ran into her cottage and returned waving a ladle, everyone cheered.

All waited together, it was a beautiful evening, bowls appeared, they discovered things about each other they had not known before. They gathered as a group as a Village, as a community in a way they had never done before; all were welcomed, none left out.

From then on everyone was aware of the needs of others, no one went hungry, no one isolated; and the soup? Well, it was delicious; the biggest surprise of it all was that it had actually been made from a stone!

Many of us keep ourselves to ourselves, not feeling accepted, not willing to take the risk, fearful that if fully known, we wouldn't belong. In God we are fully seen, fully known and fully fed by Him. This is the joy of gathering, being known, taking the chance, accepted, safe, free, belonging as one. Saints and sinners together In Jesus.

Pat Kennedy MPS