

Reflection for the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Around the world and in this country, there is a debate about the statues of famous people (mainly men) who were thought to be involved in the slave trade, sometimes to a great extent. Many find that these statues carry a very painful reminder of the exploitation and ill-treatment of their ancestors based upon race. These statues are also a reminder of the discrimination and mistreatment faced in our own time. The request is made that these statues should be removed from the public square. Others take a different view, whilst not condoning the slave trade in anyway I am sure, they acknowledge other aspects of these people's lives, such as extensive philanthropy, and public service. Still others make the point that there are deeper issues at stake than statues and there is a risk of missing these. These deeper issues, they argue, are about eliminating discrimination on the grounds of race and all its terrible consequences for the health and well-being of individuals as well as society. I should say, at this point, that despite the very important principles at stake, taking the law into your own hands and the use of violence are not acceptable as far as I am concerned. But open debate and democratic decision are vital.

As Catholics we know a thing or two about statues. We have grown up with them, been taught the names of the various statues of Our Lady, and the Saints, watched them used in veneration and walked the streets with them in procession. Housed them with us in the places where we live and perhaps also work and study. Not only fond memories I hope but a source of current comfort and reflection. They help us remember, they put us in touch with the past not by keeping us there but by making it come alive again, here, and now, with all the possibilities that entails. If you know the story behind them, statues have memory and meaning, inspiring us to draw closer to God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The fact that the story behind the statues present people with memory and meaning, may well mean the protestors are on to something when they talk about the secular equivalents of our religious iconography. Something we might be able to dialogue about. Memory and making present again are so important for our lives that Jesus' words at the last supper '*...do this as a memorial of me.*'¹ have the power to connect to each person's life, once the story is known and accepted.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we find these words "*In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice of Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present.*" We know this story and remember it, although the meaning of the Eucharist cannot be covered in one short contribution like this reflection. The Eucharist is worth a lifetime's thought and prayer and thankfully that is what the Church enables us to do. But as well as being in our minds and hearts through contemplation the Eucharist invites us into active discipleship. The Eucharist can be made present in us and as we are sustained by it on our journey of faith, we can invite others into the presence of Jesus. What should we do with the contested statues? We should first remember the story of the Eucharist because of what St. Paul tells us in the second reading, that the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity: *The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf.*² Creative solutions, acknowledging the truth, need to found to the problem of the statues. But if we find ourselves in the sad situation of the absence of love and unity over the question of history and race, it may be time to live showing, in whatever way we can, that we have experienced the real presence of Jesus.

¹ Luke 22:19

² 1 Corinthians 10:17