

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Confirmation, St Cyprian's School
16 August 2009

Ephesians 5:15-20

Psalm 34:9-14

John 6:51-58 (Readings will be taken from the NIV)

May I speak in the name of the One God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of Life.

Headmistress, educators and learners, families and friends – and especially Jazarra, Cloé-Marie and Jade, who are to be confirmed today – it is a great delight to be with you.

I am particularly relieved to be here, since last September I was prevented at the last minute from speaking at your Annual Service in the Cathedral, when I was summoned to the swearing in of President Motlanthe!

But I hope you will be gracious to me, and decide 'better late than never' – or even that I am 'worth waiting for'!

I am glad that my first occasion with you is a Confirmation – a significant milestone in the life of any Christian.

From our side, we stand up to be counted – we affirm the promises made at our Baptism: often promises made by others on our behalf, if we were baptised as small children.

And it is also the affirmation from God's side that his Holy Spirit, which we received in Baptism, will strengthen us and empower us to live out the life of faith to which God calls us.

As the beginning of the service indicated, the life of faith is marked by three particular aspects: worship, witness and service.

Worship is about growing in loving God with 'all our heart, and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength', as it says in the first of the two Great Commandments.

Witness and service are about loving our neighbours as ourselves, the second Great Commandment.

Witness is sharing with others how wonderful it is to be a Christian, and who Jesus is, and how he makes all the difference to our lives.

Perhaps we share in words – but often, we will find that our actions speak far louder.

Our attitudes also communicate loud and clear – so when we show others respect and compassion; when we behave with responsibility, integrity, and accountability, we are reflecting the values of the Kingdom of God.

This is part of the life of Service to which all Christians are called. At heart, Christian service is about helping those in need and showing love to others, the sort of love that God shows to us, in whatever ways are appropriate.

Within St Cyprians, you show love in the way you treat one another, in the little moment of each day.

Then there are also your Community Partnerships and other Special Projects – important ways of sharing God's love more widely.

Let me say a bit more about living in a relationship of love with God.

It starts, first of all, with the worship that we share together with other Christians on a Sunday. Here you are fortunate enough also to have services during the week.

Of course, God is with us always and everywhere, but shared times of worship are a special time of enjoying being in his presence, learning about him, and being encouraged and strengthened to live the life to which he calls you.

God reveals himself to us in Jesus – who is fully human and at the same time fully God. So, first of all, we see Jesus as our model, our example, of what it is to live as the human beings God intends us to be.

But Jesus is far more than someone to imitate, from two thousand years ago.

Because he died and was raised again, because we believe he ascended into heaven and is there for ever, at the side of God the Father, praying for every single one of us – because of this, because Jesus is alive today, we can have a living relationship with him.

He is like the best possible teacher, the best possible life coach – always alongside us, helping us understand, showing us how to live, reminding us, encouraging us, supporting us, helping us to be the best that we can be.

It is as if he is feeding us, day by day by day, with all it is that we need to grow to become our true selves, all that we hope to be.

‘Eat of me’ says Jesus in today’s reading.

He is not talking about the tiny amount of calories and nutrients that are in the small Communion wafer!

He wants to nourish us far more than physically.

He wants us to be fed so we can grow in our hearts and minds and souls as well: so we can mature in our feelings, in our thinking, in our spirits – our deepest innermost selves.

And, just like the food on our plates – it does us the most good if we get just enough of the right stuff, at regular meal times – and not just one huge blow-out feast once a week!

For all of us, the best way to grow as Christians, alongside Sunday services, is to develop habits of prayer and reading the Bible – on a daily basis if possible.

If you can find a quiet space in the morning, and read a passage of Scripture (and there are some wonderful notes you can buy which can help you do this in a systematic way, and which explain the passages); and if you can talk to Jesus about whatever is on your heart and on your mind, and ask his guidance in the day ahead – well, I know of no better way to get the day off to a good start.

And at bed time, it always helps me settle, to take a minute or two after I’ve shut my eyes, to talk to Jesus about how the day went: to thank him for all that went well; to ask his help to do better where I’ve let myself or others down; and to put any worries into his hands – well, I know of no better way to get a good night’s sleep!

Because Jesus was fully human, he understands what life is all about.

OK, he may not have had the stress of school exams – but he knows what it is like to be under pressure; he knows that relationships with friends and in families have their ups and downs; he knows what it is like when others don't listen or don't understand us; he knows what it is like to be happy or sad, to have hopes and fears.

There is nothing we cannot talk about, with Jesus.

There is nothing where he cannot help us be stronger in facing life. This is what he means when he says his flesh is real food, his blood is real drink.

We all need Jesus in our lives.

I am reminded of the story of a drunk, who comes across an open-air preacher who is baptizing people in a river. Not really realising what is going on, the drunk joins the line of those being immersed in the water.

When his turn comes, the preacher pushes him under the surface, and when he comes up, asks him 'Have you found Jesus?' 'No', says the drunk, 'I can't say I have found Jesus.'

So the preacher pushes him into the river once again, and holds him there a little longer. The drunk comes up, spluttering. 'So, my son, have you found Jesus?' the preacher insistently asks. 'No' says the drunk, shaking water out of his ears, 'No, I haven't found Jesus.'

So the preacher grasps him firmly with both hands, and pushes him back under the water, and keeps him there, until the drunk starts thrashing his arms and legs. He finally comes up, gasping and coughing. 'Tell me, now,' says the preacher 'HAVE YOU FOUND JESUS?' 'No I have NOT' says the drunk, rather crossly, 'Are you SURE that this is where he fell in?'

Dear friends, dear Jazarra, Cloé-Marie and Jade, we all need to find Jesus.

The good news is that he has already found us.

So let today be a day of putting our hand in his, and walking with him as our companion, our friend, our strength and our encouragement, all the days of our lives.

Amen.

[Note: At some point, it would be appropriate to express thanks not only to the Headmistress, Sue Redlinghys, but also to the Choir Master, Grant Brasler, and the Choir – who will sing an anthem, but this will be after the sermon!]