

**Celebration** \_\_\_\_\_**.....Celebrations**

These thoughts were triggered by the recent article written on the topic of *Celebrations* in the last issue of *Chairete*. They came to some sort of clarity during a tutorial with some of the students at Aquinas College. Their background is a certain vague feeling of dissatisfaction in the area of children's liturgies, and the experiences of enjoyment and celebration.

**Enjoying and/or celebrating**

I believe there is a real difference between enjoying and celebrating. I think children are naturals for enjoying, but I strongly question their capacity to celebrate.

Enjoyment is an immediate experience of living. It is embedded in life, in the "now" experience. Celebration, I believe, involves a stepping back from life. It involves a reflection on life, a look at life from outside it. It involves remembering, reminiscing; and I think this may be essential to it.

The examples of a child's birthday party and a married couple's wedding anniversary can perhaps help to distinguish the issues.

**Adult celebration:**

To celebrate calls for maturity and is an adult performance. On the anniversary of marriage when husband and wife go out to dinner, they celebrate. Dining together for them is a step back from life, out of the nitty-gritty of everyday service and practical love. The quality of the night out is not determined by the "now" experience of the menu, but by the depth of their appreciation of their relationship and their memory of the past moments when that relationship peaked. They celebrate by remembering.

Since the couple step back from life, their celebratory activity is necessarily in the area of symbol. To them the shared meal is a symbol.

**The child's party:**

I believe that a child enjoys a party, but does not celebrate it. To the child, the party is life: and what matters is the "now" experience of the fun and the lemonade and the potato chips. They are essential to the degree of enjoyment. The reason for the party is irrelevant. The fifth anniversary of being born and receiving the gift of life has no meaning in itself for the child.

To the child, the birthday party has no overtones at all of symbol. It must be now, immediate - or it is nothing. The child cannot remember (or reminisce - which is appreciated remembrance), and so the child cannot celebrate.

## **Celebration and community identity**

I believe that any community identifies itself (or, perhaps better, maintains its identity as community) by celebrating. If it simply lives without celebrating, it tends to disintegrate. To continue to be, any community needs to find its myth and consciously hang on to it. (One little theory of mine about the present inability of the interest groups within our nation to work together despite pleas from prominent politicians, etc., is that it is the result of our unwillingness as a nation to celebrate, or perhaps of our lack of anything we ever did together to remember. We don't celebrate Australia Day - we simply enjoy the day off. Anzac Day is the closest we get, but many would prefer to forget rather than remember.)

## **Relevance to sacraments**

What conclusions do I draw from this? As adults, unless we can step out of life into symbol in order to remember and appreciate, we can't celebrate. If we can't celebrate, we can't meaningfully take part in sacraments. Sacraments are essentially symbolic celebrations. With no celebrated sacraments, we shall simply disintegrate as a People of God. And the present breakdown in the Church may be due partly to the fact that even those who take part in sacraments don't celebrate them because we don't know how to celebrate.

## **Sacraments and teenagers**

For teenagers, our trying merely to make sacraments enjoyable won't keep them coming. Sacraments will be appreciated as they learn to appreciate and wonder at the saving death and resurrection of Jesus as they feel it in their lives. No life-experience of Christ: nothing to remember. Nothing to remember: no possibility to celebrate.

We enjoy life, not the celebration. The celebration will take on the nature of what we are remembering and its emotional responses. And so celebrations can just as appropriately be solemn as joyful.

## **Sacraments and children**

For children, I think that the most we can do is to hang-in and wait for them to grow up. We can try to make their experience as little of an ordeal as possible. Strictly speaking, I don't believe that a child can celebrate sacraments. Simply to try to make the performance enjoyable is largely an irrelevance. A sacrament is essentially a celebration of something significant to a person - not simply a "good time". Despite what some might say, as the child grows older, what matters is not that the child remembers an enjoyable celebration. What matters is that it remembers with enjoyment and learns to celebrate the progressive encounters it makes with Christ in the living of life.