



*St Luke's in the City*

150 years - 2009

# **Celebrating at the Crossroads**

## **7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

4 May 2008

### **Liturgy as Transformation**

Today's reflection is part two of a series on the liturgy

### **GATHERING: The Lord be with you!**

One of our temptations all through history has been for the church to become a community of the saved, a closed 'believer's church'.

Robert Hovda

The very first words spoken in the Gathering are these: "In the name of the Father (or Creator), of the Son (or Christ), and of the Holy Spirit". The *ecclesia* (church) does not depend on what you or I believe, or how we feel about ourselves or others, or God! The *ecclesia* is the consequence of the creative action of the God we have come to experience as Earth-maker, Pain-Bearer and Life-giver; the One who moved over the creation's chaotic waters, in whom all things live and move and have their being; the One is whose womb all creation was fashioned, and who knew us before we were born.

The *ecclesia* is not Anglican, nor 'bible-based', nor 'Anglo-Catholic', nor 'Evangelical', nor anything else sectarian or tribal. The *ecclesia* is constituted rather in God's name. Which is why we respond with gratitude, and relief: "Amen!" 'Let it be so!' What a relief to know that it's God's name that constitutes us as *ecclesia*, not our own fallible and fractious names! It is God, not 'believers', who is making the church. "Amen!" So this Gathering, this *ecclesia*, is about God's Presence, and our willingness to be present to the Presence.

For this reason the Presider initiates a dialogue: "The Lord be with you." The words mean what they say. The presider does not say 'Good morning,' or 'What a great day it is,' or 'What a great win we had in the rugby,' or 'Turn to page something or other.' God is present! In the *ecclesia* God speaks through God's Word, through the Sacred Scriptures and the Body and Blood on the Altar. Emmanuel, God with us. The Lord of all creation is being with you - you who are gathered here, even now and here, declares the presider.

But the liturgy is not a monologue. The *ecclesia* does not consist in a priest's solemn declarations. The *ecclesia* does not consist in a proposition, not even a wonderful proposition. Rather, the *ecclesia* is an exchange between persons - just as Christians have come to understand that God's very Being is an exchange, mutuality, a dynamic.

Recent anxieties about the role of laity betray a profound misunderstanding about liturgy. Priests are often thanked: 'Lovely service, Vicar.' But it's not the priest's service, any more than it's the laity's service. As anyone who has been to a Jewish synagogue (or the Daily Office of the church) understands, the liturgy is a

conversation, a dialogue, a verbal and bodily dance, a series of verses and responses. Hebrew poetry is almost exclusively constructed in couplets, a shape and mindset which inevitably formed Hebrew liturgy, and thus the worship of Jesus. Thus we respond to the presider, "And also with you." The circle of blessing is complete. The People of God are being constituted, and by our mutual blessing and remembering.

Fr David Moore