



Is not the bread we eat a sharing in the Body of Christ?

In our family, mealtimes were a special event, not just on Sundays, but every day. I looked forward to dinner because I knew I would be fed — not just with food, but with conversation, laughter, comfort and family. Talk usually centered around events of the day in school, at work, in our family and neighborhood. No matter how silly or mundane the subjects my brother and I shared with our parents, it didn't matter. We were listened to, and we were taught respect for each other's opinions and ideas. It truly was an experience of community.

When you and I gather with family and friends to celebrate holidays, reception of sacraments, graduations, the life of someone who died, a spur-of-the-moment get-together, and even a sporting event, we usually do so in the context of food shared in one form or another. Why is that? I believe it is for the same reason that I learned as a child — it is an experience of community among people who have something in common. Just as food nourishes our bodies, coming together in friendship and love nourishes our souls.

To the Jewish people of Jesus' day, gathering together for meals was an expression of God's care for them and their love for one another. Meals were a celebration of thanksgiving. It is not an accident that Jesus instituted the Eucharist at a meal, the Last Supper. Gathered together to celebrate Passover, Jesus and his disciples shared in a meal where he would give them and us his Body and Blood to eat and drink. It is through the celebration of the

Eucharist that our souls are nourished with the Bread of Life, and our spirits with the bread of community.

In his meditations on the Eucharist, Pope Francis reminded us that “We are a community nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ. Communion with the Body of Christ is an effective sign of unity, of communion, of sharing.” At Mass, as it was at the Last Supper, the bread is broken and shared. Sharing in the same bread, the Body of Christ, we are all made one. Our weekly celebration of the Eucharist is, and always should be, a truly joyful celebration, where our gracious God gives all in “the mystery of self-giving love” (Henri Nouwen). As Christ has shared himself in Holy Communion, so we must share with others. We must become bread for others in our efforts to feed the hungry, comfort the afflicted, visit the sick, work for justice, etc. When we receive the Eucharist, we commit to the values of Jesus. We come to Mass not only to receive but to give. As one author states, celebrating Mass together is serious business! But it also is the most wonderful thing we will ever experience as followers of Christ.

On June 22, we will celebrate the beautiful feast of Corpus Christi or what is also known as the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. This feast day was instituted by Pope Urban IV in 1264. It is celebrated on the Thursday following the octave of Pentecost, but in many dioceses, it is transferred to the following Sunday. It is the perfect time to reflect on this outrageously incomprehensible gift of a God who loves us more than we can ever imagine. This also is a time for us to recommit to the call of Vatican II for our “full, active participation” in this sacrament of unity.

As we celebrate Mass each week, may our hearts burn within us as they did to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. And may we, like those disciples, run to tell others, through our words and actions, that Christ truly is alive and present in the breaking of the bread!