

Homily for June 25, 2000  
Corpus Christi Cycle B

By Father Charles Bowes

Exodus 24:3-8  
Hebrews 9:11-15  
Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

## *We become the food we share here, and share that elsewhere.*

I had occasion to be part of two meals recently – each of very different character and yet basically the same. In one, ancient eyes sparkled with youth, reflected the dance of candlelight, watched liver-spotted hands embrace across an ocean of white linen. The gentleman said, “Imagine, we’ve been married fifty years, and I am still as excited as the first time I took you to dinner.”

And on another occasion, bronzed palms grabbed meat-filled rolls. Teammates jostled each other for the ketchup and mustard. Noisy smacks imitated the earth devouring the setting sun. “There’s nothing quite like a barbecue after a baseball game like that,” exclaimed the coach.

In retrospect, I think the philosopher Epicurus was right: “It is not what we eat but with whom we eat – even when alone – that makes all the difference. Eating, that most human of activities, is finally not a matter of providing fuel for the body; we have too many rituals surrounding this central human practice for it simply to be that. Rather, eating is more

importantly an opportunity for the union of souls. When we feast, even on simple food, with those we love, somehow we become closer, part of one another. When we break bread with strangers, they are no longer alien to us. Those with whom we eat transform us as much as, if not more than, the food we eat into something life-giving.

Isn’t that exactly what Jesus is doing on an even deeper level in today’s gospel and at every Eucharist we celebrate? In Mark chapter 16, he takes that meal which defines the Hebrews, the Passover, and fractures it only to reconstitute it with new meaning. The God who drew the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt now desires to free all women and men from sin and fear of death. The God who defined the children of Abraham and Moses as a people peculiarly God’s own now seeks to establish an unprecedented covenant of life, a new family, with all who believe in God. But notice on what level Jesus makes this offer. He offers his disciples more than the opportunity to eat with him; he insists on inviting them, inviting us, to “eat himself.” While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them and said, “Take it; this is my body. ...This is my blood.” He desires so deep a union with those with whom he eats that he proclaims himself the very food we eat, the very drink we drink.

We hunger and thirst for that deep inside. We yearn for that union with the holy that enables us to be free of fear and free of death. So intent is Jesus' love for us that he gives his flesh for the life of the world. No distance is allowed. Those who eat this bread and drink this cup really and truly partake of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus who offers himself that we may become one in him. "We, many though we are, are one body for we all partake of the one loaf," says St. Paul. That's why we fast before Mass – so that we can come here hungry for the Word, hungry for the Eucharist.

Understanding what Jesus offers, understanding why we have gathered around this altar to celebrate today, thus entails at least three consequences. First, unlike any other meal, the food we share in the Eucharist does not become us, we become the food. Where is the body of Christ today, if not enfleshed in our bodies? Where is the blood of Christ, if not pulsing through our veins? When we say, "amen" to the communion minister's "Body of Christ," are we not actually saying, "yes, this is who I am. This is who we are"? When we drink his blood, are we not recognizing the ways in which our lives flow, one into the other in love? Indeed, we do not understand why we have gathered, why we celebrate this sacrament, until we realize that we become its very mystery.

But that consequence entails two further truths. First, when we celebrate this sacrament we unite ourselves with Christ in a sacrifice of absolute adoration to the Father. We enter through the gates of Calvary into a perfect tabernacle wherein we have received redemption – the future is now. We find ourselves given with Christ in the resurrecting fire of the Holy Spirit to offer worship to the Trinity in spirit and in truth. Our offering is greater than the praises chanted by the choirs of angels, the intercessions pled

constantly by the saints. For we join them in Christ to present God to God in a worship that unites all creation in praising the glory of God.

And such worship entails a final consequence. Like the Lord Jesus, we then offer ourselves as saving bread for one another and for the world we touch – wherever and whatever that world is. Like Jesus, we pour forth ourselves as live giving blood for each other's sake – for the sake of our families, for the sake of our schools, our workplaces, our governments. When the bread is broken so that all may eat, we are broken so that we may nourish one another. When the cup is poured so that all may drink, we are poured out in lives of loving service – it is our future made present here. There is no holding back, no putting reality into safe categories from which we can stand back as silent observers. This meal insists that our lives be spent in giving life to each other and to the world we touch. As I quoted St. Augustine a few weeks ago, "It is your own mystery that you receive. Say amen to what you are!" Say amen to what you are: The body of Christ. The blood of Christ.

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