

Reflections

Homily for May 4, 2003
3rd Sunday of Easter Cycle B

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19
1 John 2:1-5
Luke 24:35-48

We, too, come to know Jesus in the breaking of bread.

Saint Luke chapter 24 tells of the appearance of Jesus in the upper room. The details, such as eating together, are intended to emphasize that Jesus has truly risen and the same person, although transformed, is the one they had known in his earthly life. He is real. He is not a ghost. The reality is actually too great for words. The opening reference to knowing him in the breaking of the bread is of utmost importance. It is a sacramental reference; it is what we are doing right now in the Eucharist.

As I mentioned last week, we are in the process of receiving a new instruction from our bishops and from the pope regarding our praying the Eucharist – a few refinements so that we might recognize the Lord more clearly in our breaking of the bread.

Catholics throughout the United States are asked to adopt a uniform practice in receiving Holy Communion. We are asked, when we approach the

minister to receive Holy Communion, that we bow, make a slight bow of the head when the minister says, “The Body of Christ, the Blood of Christ.” Our response is still, “Amen.” But we are asked to add this gesture of reverence. We are asked no longer to genuflect or to kneel as some have done, but rather that we adopt a common posture in receiving Holy Communion – that of a slight inclination of the head. This unity in gesture and posture in receiving Holy Communion is seen as a sign of our unity in the Body of Christ – yet to be realized fully but foreshadowed in this common practice. The minister says, “The Body of Christ,” and we bow our heads and say, “Amen.”

As I did last week on reflecting on Communion in the hand, having us reflect on our hands and what that means to have an open gesture like that, I'd like to reflect a bit on this gesture of bowing the head. And I'd like to do it as I did last week, asking a few questions for personal reflection and then offering some reflections that others have shared.

So I ask you to sit up straight and, for the moment, to close your eyes. And I would ask first that you simply bow your head now as you might for whatever reason. And here are some questions: What does that signify to you – that gesture of bowing your

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head – what does it mean to you? What does it feel like to bow your head? On what occasions and under what circumstances do you make such a gesture?

Here are some comments people have made when they've shared their thoughts on these questions:

"I feel as though I'm saying 'yes' to something or to someone."

"I have bowed my head when I felt guilty."

"For me it means joy and enthusiasm – something I'm affirming."

"I've bowed my head when I've not been able to look squarely at something – a bright light or a scene of carnage."

Now I'm going to say the words that you hear in receiving Holy Communion, and I'm going to ask you to bow your head and let your heart say "Amen" as you hear those words, as if you were about to receive Holy Communion. "The Body of Christ." Now I ask you this question: What does it feel like to bow your head in response to those words? Here are some comments that I've received in another setting:

"I'm saying yes to Jesus."

"I feel like I'm part of something much larger than me."

"Somehow, I'm not alone, but God is with me."

Notice, there are no wrong answers in response to the symbol. The mystery is far greater than we can ever exhaust, and so we simply rest in it.

On a personal note, I'd like to share with you that I have found myself consistently rewarded in terms of my own spiritual growth by trying to honor the prayer the Church gives us to pray – such a gesture as this

simple bow of the head. It means surrendering to it; accepting it and enrichment, deepening of spiritual life follows. These mysteries we celebrate, these sacraments are the privileged location of the experience of God. They're not the only locations of the experience of God. But they are privileged locations of the experience of God – God is here in these sacraments. So I invite you to enter into the mystery as best you can.

As last week I announced, after this Mass there will be an opportunity to reflect further on these refinements of our celebration of the Eucharist. Just step over into the Parish office building and folks will be there with coffee and a chance to reflect further on our prayer.

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breaking of bread.**