

**Homily for April 30, 2006
3rd Sunday of Easter (B)**

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Psalm 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9

1 John 2:1-5

Luke 24:35-48

We have a number of First Communions during the Easter Season. Bread: food for the body and food for the soul.

The other day I found myself at the bedside of a gentleman who was dying. As is our custom, I gave him what the church calls viaticum, food for the journey. It's Holy Communion given to someone near death. "May the Lord Jesus Christ protect you and lead you to eternal life," I prayed...the prayer of the Church as he received.

Later at the funeral, the couple who had been with him when he received viaticum told me that the bread of Holy Communion had literally been the last solid food their friend had taken before his death. Truly it was the food for the journey, for his eternal life. So often when I arrive at the bedside of one who is dying, the person is no longer able to receive Holy Communion. But this occasion was especially memorable for me, because truly this dying man had recognized the Lord in the breaking of bread.

"The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread," we read in Luke 24 today. And a little later in the reading, the risen Jesus drives home the point of his not being a ghost by actually eating some baked fish. A bit later, the Book of

Acts describes the life of the early Church this way: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

So "the breaking of the bread" was a phrase that early Christians used to describe the Mass. This ritual gesture was seen as central to the meaning of what they did when they gathered on Sunday.

The term can remind us of two significant points. We use the term "breaking bread" with friends or family as a way of speaking about sharing a meal together. Using this phrase to describe the Eucharist reminds us that the central ritual of our faith is a meal that we share with Christ. The Mass is a sacrifice, but it is also a meal. We might call it a sacrificial meal or a sacrifice in the form of a meal. Jesus chose a meal as the fundamental symbol of the Eucharist, and he reveals his presence in the breaking of the bread.

The breaking of the bread is a practical prerequisite for sharing a meal. In an age of pre-sliced loaves, we may need to remember that, in ancient times, bread was not sliced but commonly broken and shared. So the breaking of the bread speaks first of sharing, and thus it speaks of the union that we call Communion. Our liturgical prayers often speak of our sharing one bread and one cup as a symbol of our

unity in the one Christ. We break the bread in order to share the one loaf.

This practical action, however, has also taken on a symbolic meaning. Christ's body was broken for us, and his blood was poured out for us. So breaking the bread also reminds us of Christ's sacrifice. In the process, it reminds us of our commitment to share in his sacrifice. If we love as he did, we are willing to allow ourselves to be broken and to have our energy poured out. We are willing to allow ourselves to be consumed by others. We are willing to be the body of Christ, and that means we have to be willing to nourish those around us.

We do not do this exactly as Christ does, of course. We are broken and poured out and consumed figuratively, but the commitment is the same as that of Jesus. It is our willingness to love as deeply and as widely as he does that is crucial.

This deeper meaning of the ritual action is emphasized by the song that accompanies it. The "Lamb of God" speaks of Jesus as the lamb of sacrifice who takes away the sins of the world and grants us peace.

The breaking of the bread is another element of the Communion Rite that helps us prepare ourselves to enter into intimate union with Christ and with all our brothers and sisters.

In this Easter season, we celebrate a lot of First Communions. And afterwards, I'm sure a lot of bread is broken, so to speak, at festive gatherings celebrating the event. Always it is food for the journey that is a comfort for all who partake, whether young or old. And for this we give praise to the Father.

**Bread: food for the body
and food for the soul.**