

Corpus Christi

Meals and eating are vital - literally - to our human life. It is rich in meaning and symbolism. During meals (as opposed to merely eating), conversation occurs and relationships are expanded and deepened. You get to know a person better and what's going on in their lives. They get to know what is going on in yours. You have an opportunity to discuss issues of importance. "Breaking bread," as the phrase goes, is a time of sharing and the opening up of ourselves to others. It is a time of truly being present. In fact, God has done this over the ages. In Israel, there were many types of sacred meals. Many meals involved giving thanks to God for the good things of creation and for all that He had done for His people. God sealed the covenant with His people with a meal (Exodus 24: 9-18) and the annual Passover meal remembered in a real and living way that God had rescued His people from slavery, that He had made them His people and led them to the promised land.

All this is also true for the Eucharist that we celebrate and that was instituted by Jesus Christ, where He used the staple food of bread and wine. We find in the gospel that the Passover meal is prepared. Jesus used the time to teach his friends about what truly was of value in life. I believe that meals can be opportunities (especially family meals) to be an extension of the Sunday Eucharist. To have a meal involves preparation and time. A meal needs to be readied. It just doesn't happen. Those who share the table need to be willing to spend quality time with each other. Those at the meal need to be engaged with the others at the table as the meal is shared. A meal involves more than just fuelling up. Time is one of the reasons why it is difficult for many families today actually to have regular meals. There are just too many distractions and activities pulling members of households in different directions. Studies have shown time and again that eating together has many benefits beyond nutritional purposes for everyone concerned, especially for our teens. Teens who eat at the family table more often are more likely to show fewer signs of depression and feel that their family is more supportive, compared with teens who dine less often at home.

The Eucharist is sacred meal, food for eternity and if we do not take part in it at least on Sundays how can we grow in faith, hope and love? How can we deepen our bonds with God and each other? The high point is that we are fed by Jesus Christ Himself: "This is my body; this is my blood." In this feeding, we also become like the one we receive. St. Thomas Aquinas once commented that the Eucharist differs from ordinary food: When we eat food and digest it, it becomes part of us; with the Eucharist, we become part of the one we have received and consumed. Therefore, we really do enter a "holy communion" with the Lord. To receive Holy Communion is more than an action of physically eating the Host and drinking the Precious Blood. It is to take the whole Christ into ourselves. At Mass, we not only adore Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar but are invited to become as Christ. God has spoken his Word and the Word became flesh among us. As Christ is transformed sacramentally from the simple elements of bread and wine, we who receive these simple elements sacramentally are being transformed into the likeness of Christ and are then sent forth to be as Christ in our world.

So, the next time a meal opportunity arises, it would be good to remember that each of us, in some way, is to be as Christ to and for each other. This certainly is the case when the meal we share is the Mass. As we celebrate this great feast of Faith, let us worship what St. Thomas Aquinas did not hesitate to call, "the greatest miracle that Christ ever worked on earth ."..... My Body My Blood". Before the greatness of this mystery, let us exclaim with St. Augustine, "O Sacrament of devotion! O Sign of unity! O Bond of charity!" Let us also repeat St. Thomas Aquinas' prayer of devotion in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament: "O Sacrament most holy! O Sacrament Divine! All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine!"