

Body and Blood of Christ 2022

Luke 9:11-17

Luke's gospel records many meals of Jesus. At these meals, *Jesus enjoyed the company* not only of his own but of those whom conventional society rejected. The climax of these meals was his Last Supper when, among his disciples as "one who serves," he gave them his own body and blood. The final scene in Luke shows him eating fish with his disciples.

The most massive meal that Jesus provided in his lifetime was for 5000 in Galilee. We are given few details. The tradition wants us to grasp how his disciples thought *only of human resources* for dealing with the situation. Jesus transformed what he found and produced more than sufficient food from a few loaves and fishes. And the people were not fed singly but in groups of fifty, reminding us that we live in a community. The feeding of the 5000 feeding is important because it anticipates the ***Eucharist*** in the Church.

Jesus broke the bread before he gave it to the people. He will break bread again on the Emmaus road. This was the moment when the two dispirited disciples recognized him. The first Jerusalem Christians broke bread together in their life of prayer and sharing. The Christian community at Troas broke bread with Paul, and Paul did the same when shipwrecked. Thus, the Feeding of the 5000 continued in the life of the Church which knows that it lives on resources that are more than human.

The Easter experience reminds us that the Church begins with *witness*: lives changed by an encounter with the Risen Lord; men and women who then transform others by the power of their testimony and the authority of their example.

The Gospels are remarkably candid about the difficulty the first Christian witnesses had in grasping just what they had experienced:

- Mary Magdalene confuses the Risen One with a gardener,
- Two disciples walk a considerable distance on the Emmaus Road without recognizing their siren and glorified companion,
- Seven apostles on the Sea of Tiberias take a while to grasp that it's the Risen Lord who is cooking breakfast on the seashore.

Father Arne Panula writes, "The witness of radically converted lives has been the lifeblood of Christianity ever since, for at the bottom of the bottom line of Christian faith is the *encounter with a person, **the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ***. Christianity is also about creed, doctrine, morals, worship, and all the rest—but it is fundamentally about friendship with Jesus Christ and the transformation that engenders."

And he warns, "...when it ceases to be that it becomes the lifeless husk, we see in twenty-first-century Germany and other parts of de-Christianized Western Europe. Where Christianity lives today, against all cultural odds, it's because of witnesses like those initially confused souls in Judea and Galilee whose conversion began with life-shattering and life-changing encounters with the Risen One." This priest's ministry was in the nation's capital!

Who are or were the witnesses in your life that brought you to the Risen One? How do you now witness the Risen One to others?

I believe that we do witness Christ to others even though we may not realize or recognize the presence of the Risen One in our life. Others may recognize Jesus in you and may have even told you so. Sometimes we are so humble not to take their word since they may be wrong. Even if they are wrong, we do take Jesus to others when we realize the power of the presence of Christ in our lives, especially when we have received communion. Again, we show reverence to Jesus in the Tabernacle, whether we believe in his presence or not, and yet we bring Jesus to others when we leave mass and still bring Jesus within us to all we might meet, whether others recognize him or not.

That is what today's celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ is all about: the presence of Christ within us even long after our digestive systems have absorbed Him. And we can become excited about as the first Christians, but it takes a community, just as the First Community of Christians went out into the world. The only difference is the amount of time that has passed.