

Dear friends in Christ,

"The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:35)." These two disciples, one was named Cleopas and the other was anonymous, walked with Jesus from Jerusalem to a town called Emmaus on the day Jesus was raised from the dead. However, they didn't know it was Jesus they had been walking with. It wasn't until they invited him to stay and have supper with them and they saw him break the bread that they realized who he was.

Saint Luke wrote this gospel nearly fifty years after Jesus ascended into heaven to a Christian community that was mostly Greek; they were gentile converts to the Christian faith. By this time the liturgy was still being formed and the celebration of the Eucharist was central to the worship. Even back then, though, people must have struggled with the understanding of what the Eucharistic bread must have meant; was it a symbol, or was it in reality the body of Christ? The breaking of the bread was a familiar part of the Eucharistic celebration and it pointed to the reality of Jesus' body being broken open for the salvation of the world. As the bread was broken and passed around the people remembered what Jesus said, *"Take this all of you and eat it, this is my body which will be given up for you."*

Cleopas and his companion saw Jesus break the bread during that meal and that gesture of breaking and passing the bread opened their eyes so that Jesus was made known to them. When we come to Mass today we have to ask ourselves this question: what do we believe about the Eucharist? During the early 1990's a national survey indicated that over 75% of all Roman Catholics in the United States (practicing and non-practicing alike) see the Eucharist as a symbol only. If our parish is representative of this study over $\frac{3}{4}$ of those in attendance at Mass each week see the Eucharistic bread as a symbol of the Body of Christ. There are many reasons for this, but the truth remains: the Eucharist bread is infinitely more than a symbol; it is a reality. What we receive in the sacrament of Holy Communion is the living flesh and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. But how do we come to see this reality?

Perhaps one thing that needs to be looked at is the fact that there is what is called a fracturing rite during the Mass, but it is not very obvious. While

we are singing the Agnus Dei (the Lamb of God), the priest picks up the host, breaks it, and drops a piece of that larger host into the chalice. This is the same gesture Cleopas and his companion saw when Jesus broke bread with them in Emmaus; it is the same gesture that made them realize Jesus was with them all along. However, this gesture does not stand alone. While this is going on, we are doing something else. We acknowledge that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, but do we see his body being broken open for our salvation? Or, is this merely a symbolic gesture; one with very little meaning?

We have to pay close attention to what we do, and what we celebrate at Mass, or else it becomes so mechanical it has very little meaning. Jesus Christ whose body was broken open for our salvation is present in the Eucharist. We eat his living flesh, we drink his living blood, and we become more fully members of his body called to love as he loves, to take up our crosses as he has, to forgive as he has forgiven us, and to be a loving, healing presence in a world broken by suffering and pain.

Jesus Christ is the one who heals our brokenness, and we are united with him in his. If we can recognize this truth we will begin to see that the Eucharist is far more than a symbol, it is a great reality and we can truly come to know him in the breaking of the bread.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel