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Food and Drink for the Journey

Biblical Reflection for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, JUNE 10, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- Today's Gospel [Mark 14.12-16,22-26] links Jesus' death with Israel's great feast of liberation, the Passover.

At the first Passover, the blood on the doorpost prevented the death of the firstborn. The bread broken at the Last Supper symbolizes the disciples' sharing in Jesus' self-offering. Drinking from the cup of his blood creates a new and dynamic common bond. Jesus' blood sanctifies and revitalizes each of us. The Eucharist has something that distinguishes it from every other kind of memorial. It is memorial and presence together, even if hidden under the signs of bread and wine.

Our Eucharistic Liturgy proclaims the one bond of life between God and his people. Just as blood that flows outward from the heart unites all the bodily members in one flow of life, so too are we united intimately with God through the precious body and blood of Jesus. The very nature of the Eucharist implies a bond with God and with the community. Our destinies are intertwined with God's own life. We cannot be loners, for blood is a common bond.

As we celebrate the solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord this year, we realize two things: this feast is a daily one. Yet we set aside one day in the year to celebrate a feast of those feasts which we celebrate every day. Not only do we celebrate the bread and wine which become the body and blood of the Lord, we celebrate the new identity given to those who share among them Jesus' body and blood and then become what they eat and drink.

Faith in Jesus' resurrection can itself be an unproductive or dangerous ideology if it does not stimulate us actually to share bread with our brothers and sisters who are hungry. We are not engaging in social and political action but in sacramental celebration, a memorial or commemoration: the recollection of Jesus' life and death, in the conviction of faith of his resurrection as Lord, sitting in God's place of honor as the advocate of poor and oppressed people who have no bread. When we receive the Eucharist, we partake of the one who becomes food and drink for others. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, do we realize that the Eucharistic Christ is really present as bread for the poor?

Christianity, Catholicism, the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are not theological concepts, courses, things, ideas, passing fancies, symbols -- they are a living person and his name is Jesus.

Quebec's Eucharistic congress

At many moments of crisis and turbulence in Christian history, the Lord confirmed his real presence in the Blessed Sacrament in some rather miraculous ways. Most of these Eucharistic miracles involved incidences in which the Host has "turned into human flesh and blood." The miracles in Bolsena and Orvieto in Italy quickly

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come to mind, and there is, of course, the well known Eucharistic miracle story from Lanciano, Italy. Such stories seem to be far removed from our own experiences, and are often times quite hard to believe. In recent times such miracle stories have receded from the front burners of contemporary theology and spirituality and are often relegated to the realm of eccentric piety and devotion.

As Catholics we believe that the consecrated Host is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord, under the appearances of bread and wine. Therefore, Jesus, through the Eucharistic miracles, merely manifests his presence in a more tangible way. Some tell us that we don't really need the extraordinary manifestations to confirm what we already know and believe. They say that extraordinary miracles are not the essence of true Eucharistic piety, devotion and understanding.

I would like to reflect on an extraordinary Eucharistic event that deeply marked the Church in Canada and touched many parts of the world as well.

For one week last June 15-22, 2008, I rediscovered what extraordinary Eucharistic miracles are all about, only this time it wasn't in churches of old Europe. Along with 15,000 other people from throughout Canada and 75 other countries of the world, I saw the Eucharist come alive in a very powerful way in a hockey arena in Quebec City's Pepsi Coliseum during the 49th International Eucharistic Congress.

In his homily for the opening of the congress, the 84-year-old Slovakian Cardinal Jozef Tomko, papal legate to the event, said that "Jesus is the gift of God, he is the food that feeds us and fulfills us and allows us life in eternity. The Eucharist is a person, not an object, not a dead gift. Maybe we should ask not what is the Eucharist, but who is the Eucharist?" The answer to this question, Tomko said, is Jesus in the sacramental form of bread and wine "to indicate he wanted to become our food and sustain our life."

One of the very memorable and profound catechesis sessions of the Quebec congress was on the theme "The Eucharist, the life of Christ in our Lives" given by Bishop Louis Tagle of Imus in the Philippines. Bishop Tagle spoke about Eucharistic adoration outside of Mass: "Beholding Jesus, we receive and are transformed by the mystery we adore. Eucharistic adoration is similar to standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus, being a witness to his sacrifice of life and being renewed by it."

Bishop Tagle pointed to the example of the Roman centurion who guarded Jesus on the cross as a "model of adoration." "We learn from the centurion to face Jesus, to keep watch over him, to behold him, to contemplate him. At first the centurion spent hours watching over Jesus out of duty but ended up contemplating him in truth. What did the centurion see? We can assume that he saw the horror of suffering that preceded Jesus' death. But I also believe that in Jesus the centurion saw incredible love, love for the God who had failed to remove this cup of suffering from him, and love for neighbors."

The prelate concluded his powerful catechesis: "I wish that Eucharistic adoration would lead us to know Jesus more as the compassionate companion of many crucified peoples of today. Let us adore Jesus who offered his life as a gift to the Father for us sinners. Let us adore him for ourselves, for the poor, for the earth, for the Church and for the life of the world."

One day during the congress in Quebec, the daily rainfall compelled me to take a taxi to the Pepsi Coliseum. The young driver, an Algerian Muslim man, asked me from where I came and then spoke to me about the congress, having encountered so many of the delegates on the streets of Quebec City. When he learned that I was from English-speaking Canada, he lit up! "What are they giving you people to eat these days?" he asked me. I looked puzzled and asked him to explain and he did so in impeccable English! He said: "I have never seen so many happy people in Quebec City since I emigrated here 10 years ago. There has to be something in the food and drink. It must be awesome!"

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Quebec's Eucharistic Congress was a privileged opportunity for Canada to re-actualize the historic and cultural patrimony of holiness and social engagement of the Church that draws its roots from the Eucharistic mystery.

In his 2003 encyclical letter "Ecclesia de Eucharistia" Pope John Paul II wrote: "The Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist." The International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec City did just that one year ago.

[The readings for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ are Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrew 9:11-15; and Mark 14:12-16, 22-26]

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On the Net:

Salt and Light Catholic Television Network Web site: www.saltandlighttv.org

Feast of Corpus Christi: www.saltandlighttv.org/prog_slprog_snl_presents_easter_video8.html

Feast of Corpus Christi on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=IX4S7UdqieM&feature=related

2008 International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec City: www.cei2008.ca/en

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