

PRAY Loving God,
we find your Spirit among
us when we remember
Jesus and break bread
as he asked. Help us
recognize your presence
in one another as we walk
together at school, at
work, in our families, and
with our friends. Amen

4th Sunday of Easter

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SPIRIT

By Nancy Singleton Couch

There is a saying from the musical *The King and I*, “If you are a teacher, by your pupils you’ll be taught.” I’d like to change the saying to fit family life, “If you are a parent, by your children you’ll be taught.”

Kids are an amazing source of wisdom. My daughter Karin taught me what Eucharist is really all about. She taught me that Eucharist is not just what happens at Mass but a daily way of living and relating to all God’s children, of caring for them and including them. Let me tell you what I mean.

It had been one of those glorious May days in Florida. The tourists had all gone home and the natives walked the nearly deserted beaches, reclaiming their turf, letting soft balmy breezes fill them with new life and new space. In the evening, after a lazy Saturday of beach walking, the kids and I decided to go to eat at one of those places with great sandwiches and outrageous ice cream sundaes.

We parked the car. As we walked toward the restaurant, I noticed a homeless man sitting on a bus stop bench just outside. He had a grocery cart partly filled with aluminum cans, a pair of shoes, and some other articles of clothing. I



THIS IS MY BODY

noticed my daughter watching him as we walked by.

We went into the restaurant and sat down. My daughter—she was 15 at the time—suddenly reached across the table, pulled down my menu, looked me straight in the eye, and said, “Well, what are we going to do?”

Iknew she was referring to the man at the bus stop, and I was pleased that she had passed over the question “Should we do something?” and gone right to the real question. She had seen the man and could not ignore him, so for her, the “Should we do something?” question did not exist.

I, as a parent, sensed that I was on the threshold of one of those rare, wonderful, teachable moments. What I didn’t realize was that this was a learning moment for me, from which I have not stopped learning.

“What are we going to do, Mom?”

“I don’t know, what do you think?”

I said, throwing the ball back into her court.

“I suppose he’s hungry.”

“Could be,” I said.

“We should invite him to eat with us,” she said, but hesitated. “But what would he do with his grocery cart?” Karin seemed to be thinking out loud. “I doubt they would let him bring the cart in here, and I don’t think he would leave it outside. He looks pretty dirty...probably smells...and I bet the other people in the restaurant won’t like it if he comes inside to eat.”

“Could be,” I said.

“I know,” she said, “I’ll ask him if he wants something to eat, and I’ll take it out to him.” She sprang up from the table and started for the door when suddenly, she turned to me and said, “He won’t hurt me, will he?”



We kept him at a distance and denied him communion with us. We handed out food to him, but we didn't invite him in as I think Jesus would have done.

"No," I said, "and besides, I can see you through the window." As I watched her, I realized that in her process of thinking out loud she had raised all the objections that we all raise to justify not reaching out to embrace or welcome or care for the strangers and the poor. Would he hurt me? What would others (like us) think about him (who is not like us) when we (who are like them) associate with him?

When the waitress came to take our order, Karin said, "I'll have two hamburgers, French fries, and chocolate milk shakes. One to go and one to eat here, and please bring the 'to go' order first."

This perplexed the waitress, but she did as Karin asked and when the order came, Karin took a hamburger, fries, and shake out to the man. I could see them through the window.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

3rd Sunday of Easter

Jesus' Friends Recognize Him.

NARRATOR: On the first day of the week Cleopas and another disciple of Jesus made their way to a village named Emmaus seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked, they discussed all that had happened to Jesus. Jesus came near and began to walk along with them. However, they didn't recognize him.

JESUS: What are you discussing?

CLEOPAS: Are you the only resident of Jerusalem who does not know the things that went on there these past few days?

JESUS: What things?

DISCIPLE 1: Everything that had to do with Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet powerful in word and deed in the eyes of God and all the people. Our chief priests and leaders delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. We were hoping that he was the one who would set Israel free.

CLEOPAS: Not only that, today, the third day since these things happened, some

women of our group brought us astonishing news. They went to the tomb before dawn but couldn't find Jesus' body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found it to be just as the women said. But they did not see Jesus.

JESUS: What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?

NARRATOR 2: Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to him. They neared the village to which the two were going, and Jesus acted as if he were going farther.

DISCIPLE 1: Stay with us. It is nearly evening—the day is practically over.

NARRATOR 1: So Jesus went in to stay with them.

NARRATOR 2: When he had seated himself with them to eat, he took bread, blessed it, broke the bread, and began to distribute it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, who then vanished from their sight.

CLEOPAS: Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures?

NARRATOR 1: The two got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven and the rest of the company assembled.

DISCIPLE 2: The Lord has been raised!

DISCIPLE 3: It is true! He has appeared to Simon.

NARRATOR 2: Then they told the people there what had happened on the road and how they had recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread.

Luke 24.13-35

They were smiling and chatting. After we finished, we left the restaurant and headed for the car. The man came up to Karin, thanked her, and said, "God bless you." As we reached the car, she turned to me and said, "Mom, we didn't go to church today."

"We can still go tomorrow," I said.

"That's okay, Mom," she said, nodding towards the man. "That's Eucharist."

This was the moment in which Karin, my daughter, taught me.

Over the last several years I have pondered that happening many times, and I realized that in one important way the meal we shared with the homeless man really wasn't Eucharist. We did not invite the man to sit with us and to share our table. We kept him at a distance and denied him communion with us. We handed out food to him, but we didn't invite him in as I think Jesus would have done.

A year after this event Karin was killed in an automobile accident. At her funeral Mass I looked around at the huge crowd of people who gathered together. Many people were old; one lady was 94. Many were kids—classmates and friends. There were white people and black people and brown people. Karin often helped me in my work with refugees and migrant workers. We had gathered together to celebrate

the mystery of Karin's life and to grieve the mystery of her death.

When it came time for Eucharist the whole church went forward to receive communion. It seemed so right, so natural. For a brief and shining moment no barriers existed between these people of different races, different cultures, between the rich and poor. We were one.

Everyone was on the inside gathered around the Lord's table, partaking of the Lord's Being. No one was on the outside. I looked at this miraculous sight, and I thought to myself, even in her death, she continues to teach me about Eucharist, Eucharist that makes us one body.

About six weeks later, letters started to arrive that thanked me for allowing Karin's healthy organs to be used in transplants. "Because of the gift of your loved one's eyes, one who was blind now sees," one letter said. A 25-year-old man in Miami and a 25-year-old man in Atlanta, each of whom received one of Karin's kidneys, regained their health.

This 16-year-old girl who had never given birth to a child had indeed been pregnant with life. She had given birth to life, had given sight to the blind, and raised the dead to new life. Christ's words came to me, "I have come so that you might have life." And I thought to myself, "This is My Body given for you."

And still, she teaches me about Eucharist.

At the heart of the Eucharist are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1333, also 1337, 1346

OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Eucharist: Where do we experience the risen Jesus?

The same things happen on the walk to Emmaus in Sunday's gospel that happen in every Eucharist. First, disciples gather together, and when they do, they find Jesus in their midst, though they may not recognize him. Second, they reflect on their lives and the scriptures. Third, they break bread.

To the two disciples walking home together to Emmaus, Jesus is dead and gone. But they can't stop talking about him. The two don't recognize Jesus in the stranger they meet who wants to know what they are talking about. They can't believe the stranger doesn't know how



QUESTIONS 1 What motivates Karin to get a meal for the homeless man? 2 What does she teach her mother? 3 In what sense is the meal eucharist? In what sense not? 4 What does this mother's experience of donating her daughter's organs for transplant help you understand about Eucharist? 5 Why do the two disciples recognize Jesus when he blesses, breaks, and gives them bread? 6 How is the disciples experience with the stranger like our experience of Jesus at eucharist? 7 How does sharing the Body of Christ build up community?

people considered Jesus a prophet—a man from God—until the high priests and officials had him put to death.

The stranger's interest stirs the embers of the disciples' dreams. They had hoped Jesus was the messiah, a leader to restore Israel to a prominent place among nations. But this leader they counted on is gone, although several women report Jesus' body is not in the tomb and that they have seen him alive. Cleopas and the other disciple feel too disappointed to entertain pipe dreams.

It is by the breaking of bread that the disciples recognize Jesus after the resurrection, and it is this expression that the first Christians use to designate their eucharistic assemblies; by doing so, they signify that all who eat the one broken bread, Christ, enter into communion with him and form one body in him.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1329

The stranger knows Israel's scriptures. He suggests that according to the prophets the messiah must suffer and die in order to enter into his glory. The two disheartened disciples begin to hope again. Maybe Jesus' story isn't over.

The two disciples want to talk more with the stranger, so they ask him to stay with them when they get home. At supper the stranger blesses the bread, breaks it, and gives it to them. They recognize in this sign that the stranger is really Jesus.

The Emmaus gospel tells us where we can find Jesus: in any gathering of disciples—two or more; in the scriptures;

in broken bread and wine poured out, the signs of his self-giving death and life-giving resurrection.

Imagine that the two disciples walking to Emmaus are two teens this spring. Like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, they think Jesus has great potential as a friend and want to follow him. But they can't recognize Jesus when they go to Mass. They find a building full of people who stand, sit, kneel in silence, and sing slow, sad songs with no beat. Mass seems formal and foreign to their lives. They feel excluded. They seek a community that welcomes them and shares their interest in living like Jesus. Who might help them?

What Eucharist is and should be is an awesome mystery, an encounter with the Spirit of Jesus in our midst. Eucharist is the central action of the Christian community. It's our source of identity. It's where we find the future we want to commit ourselves to build. Eucharist is not only a great thanksgiving for all Jesus did in the past but also his continuing presence with us.

The Eucharist is a remembering that makes Jesus present. Like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, we gather at Mass to remember and tell Jesus' story. The readings and sermon should set our hearts



The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the church, making them a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican II #2

burning. They should touch us, stir our desire for meaning and purpose, dare us to hope love is always the answer.

Eucharist is a meal. We break and share the bread as Jesus did with the two disciples. We recognize Jesus in this sign and commit ourselves to becoming his body in the world. We share the cup to commit ourselves to give our lives in service to others. In the being together, the remembering, the breaking of bread, Jesus' Spirit moves in our midst.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1** What stranger might walk with the two teens who feel Mass is not for them? What could the stranger say? How might their story end in your parish or in your parish the way you want to help it become? What reasons do you have for joining in your parish Eucharist or not?
- 2** Why do you think so many teens believe in God and Jesus but not in worshiping together with other Catholics in their parish?
- 3** How does Jesus nourish your life?
- 4** How does Jesus get to you and empower the way you live? Does it happen in prayer?
- 5** In community celebrations like Eucharist? In private? In religion class?