

IN THE EUCHARIST WE HONOR CHRIST AND THE POOR



While visiting the Philadelphia Museum of Art I glimpsed a painting that stopped me cold. I was struck by absolute brilliance of the sun. The sun was bright, hot.

It couldn't be a painting, I thought; it must have been a photograph. I stared at it until I had to shield my eyes as I would if it were the real sun. I was completely stunned at the mastery of an artist who could paint that vividly.

That was thirty-one years ago and to this day I have not forgotten [Pichincha](#) by Frederic Edwin Church. The image is an indelible part of my memory bank.

Last summer I attended mass in New Orleans. As the bishop raised the host during the Eucharist I felt myself staring at it, unable to avert my gaze. I was struck by the absolute brilliance of the Son. The fire inside me was powerful, overwhelming. This was another "Pichincha" moment.

Today's Gospel reading begins with "the two disciples recount[ing] what had taken place on the way, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread" *Luke 24:35*.

The central mystery of our Christian Faith is the Paschal Mystery, the death, resurrection and glorious ascension of our Lord. It is the mystery celebrated in the Eucharist. I didn't know then but I know now that my Eucharist "Pichincha" moment was my complete acceptance and surrender to the Eucharist and the Paschal Mystery. At that moment Jesus made himself known to me in the breaking of the bread.

Recognizing Jesus in the Eucharist is a blessing which carries with it a responsibility: when Jesus makes himself known to us through the Eucharist we are immediately and promptly inspired and required to carry his message of love into the world.

Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that "whoever recognizes the Lord in the tabernacle, recognizes him in the suffering and the needy; they are among those to whom the world's judge will say: 'I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me'" (*Mt 25:35*).

Saint John Chrysostom's words in the 4th century become real for us: "Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked."

In today's readings St. Paul writes that "those who say, 'I know him,' but do not keep his commandments are liars, and the truth is not in them. But whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him." *1 Jn 2:4-5a*. Jesus' commandments were to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, which is the same as loving God with all our heart since we see Christ Jesus in every human being.

Pope Benedict XVI explains what keeping Jesus commandments means when he tells us that the "food of truth"—the Eucharist—"demands that we denounce inhumane situations" such as poverty, inequality, and violence. "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented"

We celebrate the Eucharist during which we recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. With this gift we are then charged with specifically and intentionally practicing the love that God demands of us; for example, feeding the hungry and challenging the structures which perpetuate hunger among *millions* of Americans and *billions* of our global brothers and sisters.

God gives us Bread. God gives us Bread because we need it. We in turn must give our bread to those who need it.

When we share our "bread", we will feel blessed and awed by the power and the grace of the Eucharistic gift we received. For each of one of us, this will be our "Pichincha" moment.

