

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ –Year A

What's the longest you've ever gone without food? What do you remember about that time? I think the longest I've fasted was during my novitiate. It was by my own choice. I didn't have any great motives for it, other than wanting to see how long I could go.

It was an interesting experiment. For one thing, I learned that it was very hard not to think about food. That started almost immediately. My sense of smell became very acute. Even the smell of the dog food factory down the street from the novitiate started to be enticing.

I also got hard to live with, unfortunately. I was irritable, so I'm told, and my fellow novices even recommended that I break off the fast for their sakes. Without some greater motivation than just to see how long I could go, three days seemed like long enough. I can't remember what I had to break the fast, but I can guess that it tasted heavenly.

The Israelites in the desert were not fasting exactly, but they were hungering. They were remembering the variety of foods they had in Egypt and longing for them. What they forget was that those foods were all tied to slavery. The manna in the desert was free. They merely had to gather it in freedom. But at times that did not seem good enough. Their forgetfulness made them unappreciative of the fact that God was keeping them alive, even in the desert.

The first reading takes place when the time in the desert is almost over. Moses is preparing the people for entry into the promised Land. There will be plenty to eat there. It's a land

flowing with milk and honey. But there will be a big temptation there, too—the temptation to forget what the Lord has done for them. He has freed them from slavery and kept them alive until the time was right for them to take possession of the Land he had promised them. God did that even in the midst of their complaining. He did it out of love for them and because he is a faithful God.

Their part was simply to trust in him and depend on him. That meant resisting the temptation to think that, once they were in the promised land, they would be able to take care of themselves and wouldn't need to depend on God anymore. That was in fact a temptation that the people gave in to, time and time again, and with dire consequences, including losing the promised land by being forced into exile in Babylon.

When we celebrate this feast of the Body and Blood of Christ it is an invitation once again to trust in God and depend on him. We have the means to do so at our disposal. The sacrifice of the Mass does not take that much to celebrate. It can be done elaborately, but it can be done quite simply, too. The form of the celebration takes a back seat to its intention: God wants us to always have access to him and to the ability to abide in him, to share in his Body and Blood so that we can truly have life and not fall prey to empty promises that don't deliver.

And a eucharistic spirituality is a means of organizing our prayer life so that we can abide in the Body of Christ even when we are not at Mass—by following the readings as they unfold throughout the course of the liturgical year, for example, or by using the prayers of the Mass in our private devotions.

We have the annual celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ to put a frame around what happens every Sunday so that it stands out: this sacrament is meant to be repeated often to bolster our ability to abide in Christ, to remain connected in him—the place we are meant to be.

All those other places we have to be, out in the world where darkness still threatens, and sin seems to be winning out, make us hungry for this meal—the risen Lord Jesus' gift of himself as food for the journey and his abiding presence in our midst until we arrived at the kingdom.

We have to remember what's happening here. Remembering is a key element of a eucharistic spirituality. Our eucharistic prayer is designed to help us do that. I encourage you to listen to it carefully today. Let its words wash over you and seep into the deepest needs of your heart, and then come forward and receive the bread of life which keeps us alive in Christ and makes us members of his very body.