

“Les Miserable, a nineteenth century historical novel penned by Victor Hugo, a native of France, is considered by literary critics to be a masterpiece, and one of the finest books ever written. The story is set in the era of the French Revolution, one of the most turbulent in France’s history. The story’s hero, Jean Valjean, had served time in prison, nineteen years, for stealing bread for his sister and her starving family. For obvious reasons, he rages against the injustices in the France of his day. His family must be fed.

To be without bread, one of life’s essential foods, was to be impoverished and without a primary source of nourishment. In Sacred Scripture, bread is the food of the poor.

Bread is the fruit of the earth. (“Blessed are you lord, God of all creation, for through your goodness, we have this bread to offer, fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life”) .( Prayer for the presentation of the gifts)

Bread is a gift. (“Give us this day our daily bread”)

On the eve of his Passion, Holy Thursday, During the Passover meal, the Lord took bread in his hands, and having blessed it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take this, this is my Body” (Mk. 14:22).

The whole feast of Corpus Christi is one big prayer: ‘Lord, give us yourself, give us your true bread.’

In the Eucharist, Jesus gives himself completely. He comes near to us and unites himself to us. He puts himself into our hands and into our hearts. In the form of bread and wine, we receive his Sacred Body and blood as food and drink for the life of the world.

In the early 1990’s, I celebrated daily mass for a small community of Carmelite nuns in Schenectady. One of the dear friends of the cloistered sisters was a woman named Ann Henninger. The story of her conversion to the Catholic Church is fascinating as well as edifying. Years earlier she was in the employ of the woman made famous in the film, “The Sound of Music”, Maria Von Trapp, an Austrian refugee who came to America in the late thirties. In her chalet, Von trap had a chapel, in which mass was celebrated daily. One day Ann entered the chapel as the priest elevated the host at the consecration. Although not a Catholic, she inexplicably fell to her knees. She truly believed Christ was at that very moment present. It was a moment of grace.

The Eucharist is a mystery of faith.

Christ is the Bread of God. It is the bread of affliction. To eat this bread is to enter into communion with the Risen Lord. To eat the body of Christ is to become the Body of Christ.

In his justly acclaimed autobiography, Saint Augustine writes of Christ speaking words of power and truth to him. Christ said, “I am the bread of the strong, eat me. But you will not transform me and make me part of you. Rather, I will transform you and make you part of me”.

In other words, we become what we eat.

Do we hunger for the “Living Bread”, Jesus Christ?

If we fail to admit our spiritual poverty, we will not seek to be fed the “Bread of God”. The Jesus who takes bread in His hands on the eve of His death and looks up to heaven is the one responsible for the Church. He is bread for us. God nourishes us with His life.

The bread of heaven is made available to us whenever mass is offered. Sadly, far too many reject the opportunity to be fed by the Good Shepherd, who never ceases to feed His flock.

We must come to Christ with empty hands.

He promises to feed us with the Bread of Heaven.