

Manna 3 – Fourth Session

To Share in the One Eternal Banquet: Eucharist and Solidarity

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*(God) loves all his children equally.
He wants to give himself equally to all,
therefore, we must continue the Eucharistic supper,
keep the door of the King's banquet always open to everyone.*
-Saint Peter Julian Eymard, from a homily ca. 1857

Preface

While stationed in Lyon, France as a member of the Society of Mary (the Marists) in the mid-nineteenth century, Father Eymard regularly visited the city jails to minister to the inmates. He also befriended members of the poor working class. In 1848, there was a revolt by workers protesting their working and living conditions. Their anger also turned against the Church and the religious living in the city. Father Eymard and his small community of Marists decided to stay. One day he found himself surrounded by a group of these angry workers. A shout went up to throw this wretched priest in the Rhone River. Someone recognized him and stopped the crowd yelling, "That's Father Eymard! He does so much good in our city." The crowd then escorted Father Eymard safely back to his house. Clearly Father Eymard's religious values opened him up to see all God's children as part of the body of Christ.

The quote above refers to the ministry of preparing youth and adults from the slums of Paris for their First Communion. This was a ministry Father Eymard started soon after founding the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in 1856. For in and through the Eucharist he saw charity and compassion as integral to love for one's neighbor.

Though Father Eymard would not have used the word "solidarity" in his preaching or teaching, his Eucharistic spirituality certainly inspired his followers to see the implications for service to the needs of the world and the Church in *our* times, especially the poor and the vulnerable. The Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament's *Rule of Life* 37 states:

*Every community that celebrates the Eucharist is called, through a radical conversion, to challenge sin and its structures and proclaim the hope of a new world. In **solidarity** with those who are working for genuine human advancement, we are alert to the social implications of our actions.*

Introduction to the theme

During this time together we will consider how experiences of solidarity enhance our understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist. In following the example of Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we discover the meaning of solidarity; we discover what it means to be one *with* others as well as one *for* others.

In the breaking of the bread, we come to share in the hungers and hopes of those who are close to us as well as those who are far away; people whom we have known our entire lives as well as people we have never met.

Calling to mind the words of the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses of Reconciliation, our gestures of solidarity, whether great or small, enable us to participate in building the reign of God, that new world where the fullness of God's peace will be revealed, where people of every race, language, and way of life will be gathered to share in the one eternal banquet.

Mindful of the pledge of love that Jesus entrusts to us, let us strive to imitate Christ by uniting ourselves with the sufferings and struggles of all our sisters and brothers. By entering more deeply into the reality of their lives through ministries of presence and service, may we experience what it means to be bread for the life of the world.

Opening Prayer

God of our past and of our future,
you have drawn us into the mystery of this moment
to experience the power of your love and mercy.

Help us in these times marked by indifference and injustice
to imitate the action of your son and our brother,
Jesus Christ.

Moved by the desires to be one with us,
he continues to be present in our midst.

Touching our brokenness,
he restores us to wholeness.
Calling us to participate in his mission of reconciliation,
he invites us to open our minds, our hearts, and our hands
in solidarity with our sisters and brothers
throughout the world.

In modeling for us the meaning of true solidarity,
Jesus leads us in the ways of peace and justice.

In the breaking of the bread,
we pray for wisdom and insight,
hope and courage,
creativity and compassion,
tenderness and strength,
resiliency and generosity of spirit.

May your Spirit, alive within us,
empower us to be effective witnesses to your covenant of love,
today and all the days of our lives. Amen.

Song Options:

“Companions on the Journey,” by Carey Landry

“In the Break of the Bread,” by Bob Hurd

Work Exercise

1. What does the word *solidarity* mean for you? Can you identify an experience of solidarity that occurred in your own life? In the life of another? In the light of this experience, highlight what you consider to be one or two of the essential characteristics of solidarity.
2. Hunger is a common human experience. Feeding others who are hungry is one of the most common and concrete expressions of solidarity that exists. Identify one biblical story about feeding others. In addition to responding to the need for food and drink, what does the story suggest to you about the hungers and thirsts of the human heart? How does your reflection on this story deepen your own understanding of the relationship between Eucharist and solidarity?
3. When we gather to celebrate Eucharist, we give expression to our belief that in Jesus Christ, we unite ourselves in solidarity with the whole world, with those who are living and with all the dead whose faith is known to God alone. How conscious are you of participating in this sacred mystery of being part of the body of Christ, of uniting yourself with the communion of saints?

The work exercise is followed by a small group sharing and a large group sharing.

Teaching

1. Solidarity can be understood in many ways. Expressions of solidarity have historical, social, cultural, political, economic, and religious significance. Solidarity is never a neutral term. It implies that one has taken sides. It suggests that one has chosen to stand with others. It reflects awareness and intentionality. Above all, it attests that humans are capable of identifying individually and collectively with the feelings and experiences of others. This capacity is known as empathy.
2. Throughout the Bible, we find numerous examples of solidarity. Among the most obvious are examples of God's solidarity with humanity. In particular, the history of the people of Israel can be read as a story of God responding to the cries of the poor, to the suffering of victims, to the appeals of those who seek justice and forgiveness. In making a covenant with Israel, God promises never to forget his people. Divine solidarity takes the forms of remembrance and mindfulness. Divine solidarity finds expression in God's interventions into human history, ongoing signs of God's faithfulness and love.
3. In turn, human persons are given the power of choice: to follow in the ways of God's love and mercy or to pursue the paths of self-centeredness and self-absorption. Repeatedly, biblical narratives remind us of the fact that entering into relationships of solidarity is always a matter of choosing to be attentive rather than indifferent. Attentiveness, like empathy, draws us into the lives of others, making us acutely aware of our own vulnerability, our own limitations, and our own illusions of security and self-sufficiency. These narratives teach us that decisions to enter into relationships of solidarity with others may require nothing less than everything of us, our possessions, our reputations, our privileged positions, our very selves.
4. Through the mystery of the Incarnation, the word of God is made flesh and dwells among us. God chooses to become human. God chooses a relationship of solidarity. In Jesus, we come to know the God who empties himself out, the God who risks letting go of his divinity in order to share in our humanity.
5. As we consider the loving presence and saving action of Jesus, as reflected in the gospel narratives, we are given numerous insights and instructions about how to live our lives in solidarity with others. Following the example of Jesus, we discover what it means to become a companion to the stranger, the foreigner, the outcast, the sinner, the victim, the little ones, the forgotten ones, the ones who are grief-stricken, the ones who are sick, the ones with disabilities, and those whose ways of living are very different from our own. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-10), in the explanation of the great commandment (Luke 10:25-28), in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), and in the story

of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), Jesus is unambiguous about the demands of solidarity and the centrality of relationships of solidarity as a condition for participating fully in the reign of God.

6. Focusing more explicitly on the meaning of being companion, Jesus demonstrates over and over again the connection between the hungers of the human body and the human heart. From the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17), to the dinner at the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), to the Last Supper, to the table fellowship experienced in Emmaus (Luke 24:29-32), Jesus exemplifies through his own way of being in the world the importance of attentiveness, the meaning of empathy, and the transforming power of solidarity. Here we begin to see with the eyes of faith the interactive dynamic between our experience of the Eucharist and our experience of solidarity.
7. Practically speaking, we may ask ourselves who are the people with whom we desire to break bread? Who are the people we invite to our tables? Who are our usual companions? And more to the point of solidarity, it is equally important for us to ask ourselves who are the people we exclude, the people we forget, the people we ignore and overlook? And why do we do so? What do our actual patterns of table fellowship in the ordinary day-to-day experiences of life teach us about our capacity to enter into relationships of solidarity? What do our experiences at Eucharistic liturgies teach us about the choices facing us as we endeavor to follow the example of Jesus by being in solidarity with others?
8. As we think about the meaning of solidarity in more global terms, it is important to emphasize the companionship that we share through our faith in Jesus Christ with millions of our sisters and brothers, who gather as we do, to commemorate the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Every day we read in the papers, listen to the news, watch special televised reports, and surf the internet. As disciples, as companions on the journey, we may need to pause every now and then to ask ourselves how attentive and empathetic we really are when it comes to being in solidarity with people we have never met, but whose struggles, sufferings, and fears are brought home to us each day.
9. In the breaking of the bread and in the sharing of the cup, God draws us into the heart of the world and sets us in relationship to one another. Whether or not we choose to be in genuine solidarity with others, however, is ultimately a decision we must make and act upon. These choices are the measure of our integrity and fidelity as a Eucharistic people.

Resource helps for this teaching

- *Bread for the Journey*, by Anthony Gittens. Maryknoll, Orbis, 1992.

Closing Prayer

If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, exposition is made during the opening hymn. When the hymn is concluded, the assembly kneels in silence for several minutes. During this silence, the community welcomes the presence of the Risen LORD before them in the Blessed Sacrament and within them as the LORD'S own body.

Opening Song: “In the Breaking of the Bread,” by Bob Hurd or
“Bread for the World,” by Bernadette Farrell

First Reading: 1 Kings 17:8-24

Period of silence:

Second Reading: Luke 8:40-42, 49-55 *optional*

Period of Silence:

Intercessory Prayer:

If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled community occurs after the prayers. Consider using the ritual books for Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside of Mass (2024) that provides this ritual texts of prayer, praise, The Lord's Prayer, etc.

Benediction: *optional*

Reposition: *optional*

Closing Prayer:

O God of the covenant,
you are faithful from age to age.
Always mindful of our needs and concerns,
you have loved us and set us free.
With tenderness and mercy,
you have embraced us and graced us with your abiding presence.

In solidarity with all creation,
Jesus, your Son, came into the world.
Becoming one with us in all things but sin,
he instructed us in the ways of compassion and justice.
Making us his companions,
Christ offered the bread of his body for the life of the world.

Christ commissioned us to be his witnesses to the ends of the Earth,
commanding us to love one another as we have been loved.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit,
we pray that we may continue to grow
in genuine solidarity with all of our sisters and brothers,
especially those who are among the most vulnerable in our world.

We make this prayer in gratitude,
for all of the blessings and challenges we have received.
We thank you for the grace of being companions on the journey.
Amen.

Sign of Peace:

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