

May 29, 2016 Corpus Christi Homily: Brothers and sisters, in the baked goods section of our local supermarket, Hannaford, one can choose from a variety of breads. According to experts in the field of nutrition, the best choice available to the consumer is artisan bread, a multi-grain organic food, with no additives. In biblical times, it was reckoned as the food of the poor since the ingredients were relatively simple and inexpensive. Consisting of only a little flour and water, it is high in fiber and rich in minerals. For the discriminating consumer who is concerned about maintaining a sensible diet and good health, it is "a no-brainer".

In celebrating the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, we need to be reminded of the significance of bread, the fruit of the earth, particularly in the pages of Sacred Scripture.

Just consider the following: Christ was born in Bethlehem, a name which means "House of Bread"; In the Lord's Prayer we pray to the Father to "give us each day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11); Christ identifies Himself as the "bread of Life" and "the living bread came down from Heaven" (Jn. 6:33, 35); On the night of the Last Supper, "Jesus took bread in his hands, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat, This is my Body" (Mk. 14:22); The disciples of Emmaus recognized the Risen Lord in "the breaking of the bread"(Lk. 24: 31); and in today's gospel reading (Lk. 9:11-17) the evangelist and author of the third gospel, St. Luke gives us an remarkable account of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. Five loaves of bread are brought to Jesus. He takes the meager offering and multiplies the bread. Earlier in Luke's gospel we are assured by the Blessed Mother that "God fills the hungry with good things". Tellingly, today's gospel concludes by saying "They all ate and were satisfied". Those to whom Jesus made himself closest, the poor and downtrodden, often survived on small morsels of bread.

Our Catholic faith teaches us that the Creator and Lord of all things makes himself a grain of wheat. He makes himself bread to be broken, shared, and eaten. He makes himself our food to give us life, through this same divine life Jesus comes near to us and unites Himself to us in a most striking manner. It is a holy gift. To eat this bread is to communicate, to enter into communion with the risen Lord.

All of us are in need of this bread. A "bread" unlike any bread purchased in a store or baked in the comfort of our homes. It is food for the soul!

Why bread? First, bread is made of many grains. Pope Benedict reflects on the jumble of the many different grains, which he describes as "an event of union". He writes: "In communion we receive Christ. But Christ is likewise united with my neighbor. Christ and my neighbor are inseparable in the Eucharist and thus we are all one bread and one body. A Eucharist without solidarity with others is a Eucharist abused! The many grains remind us of the mystery of the faithful. Undoubtedly, the Pope is influenced by St. Paul's reflections on the Eucharist. He writes: "Because there is one bread we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor.10:17). Second, the mystery of the passion is hidden in the bread. We recall Our Lord's words in the gospel of John, "Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies it produces much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). The late Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, suffered a martyr's death while celebrating Mass in a nun's chapel. When "breaking the bread", he suffered a mortal wound. He was shot by policemen who were loyal to the ruling junta. The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church!

When you return to the baked good section of the local grocery store and see the Artisan bread, remind yourself of the mystery of the Altar in which Christ appears as our food and drink. Recall that he chose to identify with the poor for whom bread is the staple of life. He is especially close to those who hunger for him. He satisfies our hunger.

Amen!