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Life flourishes when we receive Eucharist

Melissa Musick Nussbaum | Nov. 15, 2011

Our oldest grandchild just turned 8. In the spring, he will make his first holy Communion. Luc is not looking forward to the day. In our list of ?likes, dislikes and matches,? perhaps nowhere are we so mismatched than on the subject of Sunday Mass. I look forward to it; Luc doesn?t. For one thing, Mass is inside. Inside means no skateboards, no bicycles, no slides, no tree houses and no chickens.

(Luc?s family keeps a chicken coop and eight chickens in the backyard.) Then there are the long periods of not talking while other people talk and not moving while other people move. No shouting or jumping in Mass, and Luc likes to shout and jump.

Now another obstacle looms. ?Ma-maw,? his says, in a tone that suggests he shouldn?t have to state the obvious, ?I don?t want to eat Jesus? body. I don?t want to drink his blood.?

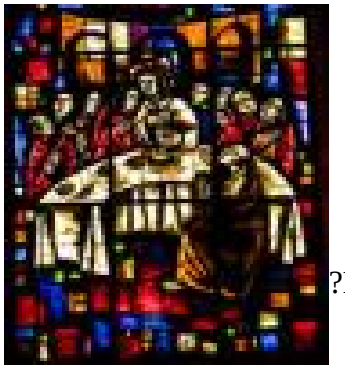
This exchange was hurried, words spoken in the hallway after Sunday Mass. I had tossed off the bright observation that he would soon be receiving Communion with us, and wasn?t that exciting. Well, no, he explained, no, it wasn?t and then he told me why. Before I could decide how to respond, Luc?s parents called him to hurry to the car. They were headed to a birthday party, where Luc could happily assume none of the food would be human. Or divine.

I promised Luc we would talk later.

This is what I will tell him:

I will ask him to remember the stories he has heard of his birth and the birth of his sister, Anna. I will ask him to remember the months before his baby brother, Leo, was born, when he was still inside their mama. I will ask him to remember the pictures his mama and papa showed him that year, pictures of a tiny unborn baby, no bigger than a watermelon seed, growing week by week, until he reached almost 8 pounds at his birth.

I will ask him to consider how Leo grew so strong and big in the womb when he had no recognizable food in there. Luc knows humans need food to eat. He learned to draw the food pyramid in first grade, and he knows about, even if he doesn?t necessarily agree with, the need to eat broccoli and tomatoes before attacking the ice cream.

 ?How do you suppose he got bigger in there,? I will ask him, ?inside Mama where he could not shop or garden or cook??

Leo got everything he needed, I will tell him, all the vitamins and all the nutrients -- real food, life-giving food -- from his mama?s flesh and blood. Just like all babies. We?ll talk about the umbilical cord bringing food to the baby and the womb growing with the baby, expanding into a warm, cozy house. All of it just what Leo needed, when he needed it.

And feeding the baby didn?t hurt his mama, or weaken her, or make her sick. She didn?t die or diminish. There was plenty for the baby and for her.

There was a time when Luc wanted to read *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak many times a day. He knew by heart Max?s threat to his mama, ?I?ll eat you up.?

He knew by heart the plea of the wild things whose king Max becomes, ?Oh, please don?t go. We?ll eat you up, we love you so.?

Soon, too soon, Luc will meet real wild things, those whose idea of love is summed up in Sendak?s rhyme: ?Oh, please don?t go. We?ll eat you, we love you so.? He will find the people who would ?love him to death.?

I pray he will survive them.

I pray that before he meets these real wild things -- the needy girlfriend, the addict friend -- he will come to know by heart the one who feeds us, but does not feed on us.

I pray that Luc will learn the joy of coming again and again to the table. God waits for us there, like a mother bearing and feeding her child. God?s flesh is our food. God?s blood is our drink. It is freely given. It is given to us, and for us. It is always what we need, when we need it.

When we come to Christ in the Eucharist, we do not ?eat him up, we love him so.? Christ is not diminished or weakened or hurt when we receive his body and his blood. When Christ shares his body and his blood, life awakens. Life increases. Life flourishes. Life grows. Life, and more life, like a baby growing daily in the womb, eyes opening, limbs moving, heart beating. We do not ?eat him up?; rather, we share in Christ?s life. Like a child linked to her mother by the live and pulsing, nourishing and sustaining umbilical cord, we are linked to Christ. In Christ, as a child in his womb, we live and move and have our being.

I will tell Luc some of this good news. Some he will discover on his own. Perhaps the day will even come when we will both be at Sunday Mass because there is nowhere else we?d rather be.

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