Spirituality
Pencil Preaching

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"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger" (John 6:35).

Acts 8:1b-8; *Jn 6:35-40*

On his way to Rome and martyrdom, St. Ignatius of Antioch spoke of his death in the teeth of lions as having his bones crushed like wheat threshed to make bread. He was eager to offer his life as Eucharist, his share in the Body of Christ.

In today's reading from Acts, Stephen is crushed under a hail of stones, the first martyr of the early church. He, too, was witnessing to his union with Christ "in the breaking of the bread." In today's Gospel, when the crowds asked Jesus to give them bread from heaven, he declared that he himself was that bread, the manna from heaven: "I am the bread of life."

It cannot be emphasized enough that our faith in the resurrection is intimately tied to our participation in the Eucharist. This is where we will encounter the risen Christ, even as the disciples on the road to Emmaus encountered him. Together with sharing the Word of God, receiving Communion is the most important way for us to nourish our transformation into Christ.

This commitment to celebrating the Mass ritually with our communities of faith is, of course, also inseparable from recognizing the larger implications of the symbols and sacraments of the church. They remain empty if we do not see Christ in the members of his body, our fellow believers.

We will not know Christ if we do not see and respond to him in the poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, refugee and immigrant brothers and sisters all around us in our world. This is where Jesus promised to be, waiting for our love and service as the true test of discipleship.

Easter is a way of life, an attitude and an awareness that makes us ready to act whenever the Spirit prompts us. The harvest has begun, the wheat is being gathered to make the bread of life that will nourish us all the way to heaven. Those who understand this and live it are already experiencing the Beloved Community God has promised us in eternity. Why not start early, today, right now?