Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

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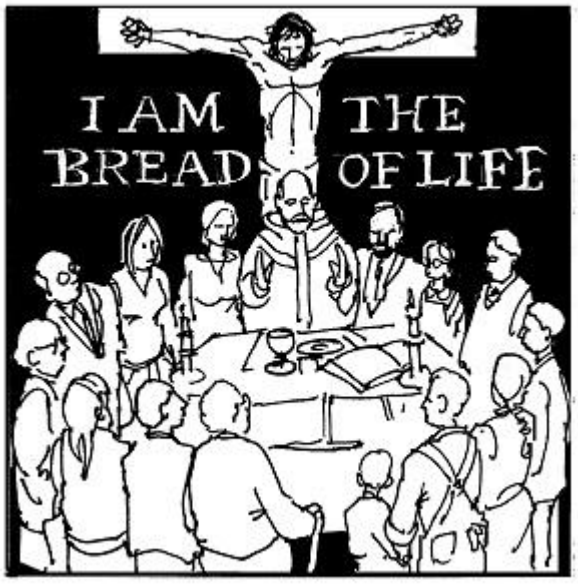

Author's note: *I will be on the road during the coming week. Pencil Preaching will resume on Sunday, May 7. Thank you. Pat Marrin*

"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53).

Acts 9:1-20; Jn 6:52-59

Today's two readings -- the story of Paul's conversion in Acts and Jesus' words in John-- are both about the mystery of the body of Christ.

Paul was on his way to Damascus to crush the heretical "Jesus" movement when he encountered the very Jesus, crucified and risen, who tells him to stop persecuting *him.* By attacking the Christian community Paul was attacking Jesus himself.

This revelation is burned into Paul's consciousness and will become the basis for his entire, unfolding vision and ministry. It is so powerful that first it blinds him. He will spend the rest of his life learning and articulating the implications of his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Paul learns that Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God, human and divine, is inseparable from the members of his body, the Church. This union is no superficial affiliation but a flesh and blood reality. Anyone who persecutes the disciples, wounds their bodies and spills their blood, is persecuting Jesus. Anyone who joins the disciples by baptism becomes flesh and blood with Jesus.

As the family of God, we are blood relatives, brothers and sisters, and we share the divine image as our family resemblance. This intimacy is comparable only to the nuptial union of husband and wife, who become one flesh, another image of the biblical covenant between God and Israel as bridegroom and bride.

What a marvelous realization. It changed Saul into Paul, a zealous persecutor into a tireless Apostle. The rich foundation of theology in his letters gave us our Christology, spirituality, sacramental theology and the Paschal Mystery, the core program of transformation every baptized person undergoes by dying and rising with Christ as the pattern of their daily lives.

The Second Vatican Council recovered the Eucharist and the Mass with this vision. When we gather to celebrate Mass, Christ is truly present in the Word, in the consecrated bread and wine, in the celebrant and the assembly. At Communion we receive the body and blood of Christ to become Jesus Christ in the world. Our service and suffering are redemptive because Jesus is at work with us and in us.

This is why Jesus is so adamant in John's Gospel that incorporation into his body, sacramentally and communally, is the essential source of nourishment that makes us grow in the mystery of God in the world. To neglect or turn away from the eucharistic table is to starve to death spiritually.

Come to the banquet. Let all those who hunger and thirst for God come to the Table of the Lord. Jesus is the perfect Host, and if we are his guests, we too shall host and feed others who will come to God through us. This is the joy of the Gospel.