



LET US PRAY – REFLECTIONS ON THE EUCHARIST

Fr. Roger G. O'Brien, Senior Priest, Archdiocese of Seattle

During this Year of the Eucharist, I offer a series of articles on Eucharistic Spirituality: Source of Life and Mission of our Church. Article #8, *Henri Nouwen on Eucharist*.

Luke tells the story of the encounter of two of Jesus' disciples with Jesus, the day of his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus. (Lk. 24:12-14).

Sad and downcast, they walk along when, without recognizing him, Jesus approaches and begins to walk with them. "What are you discussing?" he asks. They describe what happened the last few days, "the prophet powerful in word and deed, and their hope that "he was be the who would set Israel free."

They added that "some women of our group" astonishingly related that angels at the tomb had told them he was alive! Jesus interpreted every passage of scripture from Moses and the prophets that referred to him. As they drew near the village, the stranger acted as if he were going farther, but they pressed him: "Stay with us, it is nearly evening." And he did.

"When he had seated himself with them to eat, he took bread, pronounced the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him; whereupon he vanished from their sight. They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning inside as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

Henri Nouwen writes of this encounter the following message:

We hardly ever think of Eucharist as an invitation to Jesus to stay with us. We are more inclined to think about Jesus inviting us to his house, his table, his meal. But Jesus wants to be invited. Without an invitation, he will go to other places. It is very important to realize that Jesus never forces himself on us. Unless we invite him, he will always remain a stranger, possibly a very attractive, intelligent stranger with whom we had an interesting conversation, but a stranger.

Only with an invitation to "come and stay with me" can an interesting encounter develop into a transforming relationship. One of the most decisive moments of the Eucharist – and of our life – is the moment of invitation. ... "I have heard you, my heart is changing...please come into my home and see where and how I live." This invitation...makes all the difference in the world.

But do we invite [Jesus] into our home? Do we want him to come to know us

behind the walls of our most intimate life? Do we want to introduce him to all the people we live with? Do we want him to see us in our everyday lives? Do we

want him to touch us where we are most vulnerable? Do we want him to enter into the back rooms of our homes, rooms that we ourselves prefer to keep safely locked? Do we truly want him to stay with us when it is nearly evening and the day is almost over?

The Eucharist requires this invitation. Having listened to his word, we have been able to say more than, "This is interesting!" We have to dare to say: "I trust you; I entrust myself, with all my being, body, mind and soul to you. I don't want to keep any secrets from you. You can see everything I do and hear everything I say. I don't want you to be a stranger any longer. I want you to know me, not only as I walk on the road and talk to my fellow travelers, but also as I find myself alone with my innermost feelings and thoughts. And most of all, I want to come to know you, not just as my companion on the journey, but as the companion of my soul."



[Saying that is not easy. We are fearful people, fearful of opening up. We even hide part of ourself from ourself. But asking Jesus into our home is terribly important, just like it was for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. What happens there happens to us in Eucharist, when, like the two Emmaus bound travelers, we invite Jesus to stay with us.]

[He sits down at table. We look at him. He looks at us.] There is intimacy, friendship, community. Then something new happens. Something scarcely noticeable to an untrained eye. Jesus is the guest of his disciples, but as soon as he enters into their home, he becomes their host! And as their host, he invites them to enter into full communion with him." (*With Burning Hearts*, pp. 57, 58, 61. Henri Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts: a Meditation on the Eucharistic Life*. New York Maryknoll Orbis Books, 1994. Used with permission.)