

1.THEN AND NOW: When the crowds followed Jesus into a “deserted place” they were also hungry for a *better place* and a *better life*. Jesus begins by welcoming them. Then he tells them about the Kingdom of God and God’s love for them and then he heals those who were sick.

Notice, this is the very same formula that happens at Mass where we are welcomed, where we confess our brokenness, asking for healing; where we are inspired by his words and then, Jesus feeds the crowd - us - with his own Body and Blood.

2.FAMILY MEAL: But in our setting, it is more than just any random crowd coming together. We are family and what really defines a family, perhaps more than bloodlines, is eating meals together. Meals together nourish more than just the body. At Mass, we gather together as we do meals in a family, whereby we greet one another, speak of all that transpired over the week we were apart. Then we pray as a family and then we are fed.

In this context of a sacred meal, Christ instituted the Eucharist where we are gathered into one faith in the Church, one in Christ – all equals – be it bankers and the homeless. It is this sacred Eucharistic meal we share together that makes a family of faith.

3.NOT JUST A FADED MEMORY: The Eucharistic bread and wine are more than reminders of the past. They are a living reality, the Body and Blood of Christ. Our founder, Jesus Christ, is alive and present to us. This is what distinguishes us from all other faiths, all of whose founders are dead.

+When Buddha, for example, was on his deathbed, one of his disciples asked him for a memorial and Buddha gave him a Jasmine flower. But as the flower dried up, the memory of Buddha the man also dwindled, as only his ideas live on. Jesus, however, continues to live in his followers and the Eucharist, forever present to us, while Buddha lives only in history books.

4.AWAKENED: Corpus Christi means the body of Christ. Fr. Thomas Keating writes, “The mystery of his body is the mystery of his glorified existence in the bosom of the Father, where he abides as the source of all reality, and the mystery of his hidden presence in the Eucharist, where he abides in the bosom of the Church until the end of time. As soon as we receive the Eucharist, we are in the bosom of the Father, because we are in him who dwells in the bosom of the Father.”

As someone once put it, "Through him, we do not become God, but we become what God is." When we receive Communion, we have a closer contact with Jesus than was possible to anybody during his earthly life.

Keating then adds, “The whole of humanity is the body of Christ waiting to be raised from the dead. Christ has risen and our Lady has been assumed into heaven. But we, like Lazarus, are still in the tombs. Christ comes to us in the Eucharist to awaken us from the sleep of faith.”

5.TO PARTAKE IS TO SHARE: When we *receive the Body of Christ*, awakened, we become *the Body of Christ*. In the Eucharist we share in the life of Christ, to share his life *with others*.

When the disciples told Jesus, “This is a deserted place,” they could have been describing the streets of our own modern-day world, where people still hunger for food and other material things and especially for their spiritual needs. Life can be a “lonely and deserted place”. And the Lord may still say to us what he said of his disciples, “Give them something to eat yourselves.” And there he will be present, feeding them with life.

This Eucharistic life involves us sharing ourselves with those who are joyful, but particularly with those who suffer. At times, we may be called to share our life with people who are sick or old, with people caught in the world of drugs or we may find ourselves with people who are very angry, who feel abandoned and unloved. There are so many hungry and suffering people in the world today who have lost their way. Yes, give what little you have and Christ will do the rest.

+Peter Nixon, in *Give Us This Day*, experienced this: Several years ago he was leading a communion service for inmates at a county jail near his home. During his reflection on the Scriptures, he noticed a young man weeping quietly, just a tear or two streaming down his face.

After the service, he remained seated while the other men got up to leave. “I walked over to him, placed my hand on his shoulder and asked, “Are you okay?” He rose, wrapped his arms around Nixon in a bear hug, and began weeping into his shoulder. They just stood there for several moments.

“What this young man needed that morning was not the word of my reflections and perhaps not even the Word of God in the Scriptures. He needed to be touched. He needed an embrace that would communicate better than any words, “You are loved. You are forgiven. You are not alone.”

The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is celebrated after the close of the Easter season. We have walked with Jesus through his Passion, Death, and Resurrection. The fires of Pentecost console us after Jesus departs for a final time in the Ascension. And here we are, 2000 years later, surrounded by Jesus Christ, surrounded by family.

All of us can feel overwhelmed at one point another, where we might feel like that man in prison. But in the Eucharist, and through each one of us, Jesus leaves us with more than a memory to sustain us.

He gives us his touch. He gives us a powerful embrace that says to us, “You are loved. You are forgiven. You are not alone.”