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Spiritana **NEWS** MISSIONARY

Year of the Eucharist



The Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 – October 2005

At the 2004 Spiritan General Chapter in Portugal, the liturgical highlight for many delegates was a Mass in Urdu with Pakistani rituals. The celebrant, dressed in a saffron robe over white clothing, was seated on the floor along with several other participants (see back cover). There were extended times of silence, offerings of flowers and incense, various chants and blessings. It was different but deeply prayerful.

At the heart of the Eucharist is someone who said, "This is my body and I give it to you. This is my blood and I shed it for you." He identified himself with bread and wine — received, blessed, broken and given to others. When he was dead and gone his followers gathered in their houses in memory of him. They combined the Eucharist with a regular meal. They prayed in Aramaic or Hebrew or Greek, their native tongues. There was a communion-meal: communion with each other and with their risen Lord.

Over the centuries they grew more numerous and used Roman basilicas and mediaeval cathedrals for their gatherings. Greek gave way to Latin, the new vernacular. More formal and elaborate liturgies became the norm. In the Middle Ages the ordained priest took over as mediator between the people and God. He alone "said mass", much of it in silence. The people watched a clerical celebration or said their own prayers. The highpoint of the Mass was the Consecration. When the priest said its sacred words the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ. As he elevated the host and chalice the congregation bowed their heads in reverence, awe, intimacy and silent adoration. A sense of unworthiness deterred many from going to Communion and a law had to be promulgated commanding them to receive once a year, provided they were in the state of grace and fasting from midnight.

Their focus had shifted from meal to sacrifice: the death of the Lord, his blood poured out for others. They emphasized Good Friday and Calvary more than Holy Thursday and the Last Supper. After Mass the hosts were reserved in the tabernacle offering an intimate and ongoing focus of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament as well as Viaticum for those in danger of death. At Benediction the large host was placed in the monstrance which the priest traced in a sign-of-the-cross blessing over the people and carried in the outdoor procession at Corpus Christi.

Early centuries gave rise to different eucharistic insights in Western and Eastern Christianity. Since the Reformation Catholics and Protestants have debated the relative importance of bible and bread, word and wine. A contemporary understanding of this sacrament of sacraments includes a deeper appreciation of the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands as the raw material for the holy. It emphasizes the fourfold presence of the risen Christ in the congregation, the celebrant, the biblical readings, and the bread and wine. It reminds us that there is nothing automatic or magical about the ritual: good celebrations foster faith, poor celebrations weaken faith. It recalls the understanding that goes back to the time of Saint Augustine: as we celebrate we affirm and become what we are — all together the body of Christ, individually his body parts. "He has no body now on earth but yours, no hands, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks out on the world. Yours the feet on which he goes about doing good" (St. Theresa of Avila).

And among the Marwari people of Pakistan Spiritan missionaries are discovering that a basically European understanding of Eucharist is not the last word.

Patrick Fitzpatrick CSSp

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Harvest Grains

Sower God sent a seed
to feed the peoples of the earth.
It ripened in the womb of Myriam of Nazareth,
and saw the light of day in Bethlehem,
the House of Bread.
Its cradle was a manger — a feeding trough for cattle.

The seed fell freely on the beaten paths
and fertile earth of Galilee.
But it could not break and enter
dry and stony ground.
Hardened hearts excluded it,
cluttered living choked it.
Those whose lives were chock-a-block
had room for nothing more.
But where the soil was soft,
that seed could nestle, die,
take root, and yield
abundant harvest grains.

Still the Sower scatters seed
to feed the peoples of the earth:
with us evermore in harvest grains
and the breaking of the bread.

In Galilee
the teacher took the bread they brought,
said grace, broke and gave it to his friends:
“Give the hungry something to eat.”
They fed five thousand hillside guests.
Twelve hampers were collected,
leftovers from the picnic:
abundance where there once was want.

In Bethany,
against the custom of her people
Martha entertained her rabbi friend.
She toiled to make the welcome real —
the food, the drinks, the setting,
the preparations and the cooking.
the kitchen heat, the timing of the courses.

At his feet
reclining where a rabbi’s male disciples
normally reserved their seats,
Mary kept him company —
a woman friend.
He longed for Martha’s presence too.
Busyness took her away from him.
Host and guest keep company,
sit and talk, smile and laugh together.
Meal is more than menu.
Feast is more than food.

In Jerusalem
the supper menu is
unleavened bread and choicest wine.
Once more he took the bread,
said grace, broke and gave it to them:
“My body given for you.
Do this in memory of me.”

En route to Emmaus
a stranger bore the brunt
of two disciples’ dead and buried hopes.
Their dammed-up disappointment
sluiced sadly through their words
as they relived a field of dreams
become a desert of discouragement.
Invited to their evening meal
the stranger gave himself away.
They knew him when he took the bread, said grace,
broke and gave it to them.

Still the Sower scatters seed
to feed the peoples of the earth:
with us evermore in harvest grains
and the breaking of the bread.

THE WEDDING FEAST

AT GANA OF GALILEE



You have kept the best wine until the end.

John 2:10

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| December 2004 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 | February 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 | | | | | New Year's Day 1 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Epiphany of the Lord | St. Elizabeth Seton | | | Blessed Brother Andre | Eastern Catholic / Orthodox Christmas | |
| 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Baptism of the Lord | | St. Marguerite Bourgeoys | | | | |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| Week of Prayer for Christian Unity | | | | | | |
| 2 nd Sunday in Ordinary Time | St. Anthony, Abbot | | | | St. Agnes | |
| 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| 3 rd Sunday in Ordinary Time | St. Francis de Sales | | | | | |
| 30 | 31 | | | | | |
| 4 th Sunday in Ordinary Time | St. John Bosco | Conversion of St. Paul | St. Timothy and St. Titus | St. Angela Merici | St. Thomas Aquinas | |



January 2005

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