



FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT, YEAR B

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"...unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit." John 12:24

Bread is loaded with a rich symbolism that Jesus understood. Bread is the "*fruit of the earth*", as the priest says when he presents the bread at Mass. The bread points to the earth. It is clear from the Gospel that Jesus often pondered the grain of wheat. In the parable of the growing seed, he says: "*The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear*" (Mk 4:28).

When the grain falls into the earth, it draws energies from the earth itself. It lives and develops by the help of the earth's mysterious powers. The sprout needs all the powers of heaven: rain, light, warmth, wind. The development of the seed engages the entire physical world. By the fact that so many cosmic powers are involved in the grain of wheat's growth, it could be seen as a synthesis of the whole cosmos.

The bread is also the result of "*the work of human hands*". There would not be bread if man did not sow, harvest, grind, knead, and bake. All of this work is or should be a concrete expression of love. Man's work is, first of all, to nourish himself. But, unlike animals, man takes his nourishment in the form of a meal. And a meal means fellowship, love. Strictly speaking, man works, not to nourish himself, but, rather, to nourish his family and loved ones. We are created to give life to others, never to ourselves.

Actually, all of our work should be a work of love. We work with the physical world to make life easier, not primarily for ourselves, but for others. By our work, we create possibilities for deeper fellowship. The Bible describes how the history of mankind evolves into a universal meal where all sit at the same table.

The bread, which is the fruit of man's work, symbolizes man's effort to humanize the world; an effort that is made or should be made with love.

But bread also has something to do with Jesus himself. He likens himself to a grain of wheat: "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit*" (Jn 12:24). The grain of wheat is entrusted to the earth but rises up later in the form of an ear. Where the original grain multiplies, so Jesus by dying and rising has brought a multitude of brothers [and sisters] who are like him (Rom 8:29) and who, therefore, in their turn must follow the same law of death, resurrection, and fruitfulness, a mystical life cycle repeated from generation to generation for 2000 years.

To die in order to give life: that is what we can learn from the grain of wheat.

So we see already in the Eucharist's form of bread that this *sacrament has a sacrificial character*.

The bread symbolizes the whole cosmos, the work of all mankind, and Jesus himself

Luke writes that Jesus "*took*" ("*lambano*") bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "*This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me*" (Luke 22:19). The Greek word "*lambano*" means both to take and to receive, "*to take hold with the hand*" or "*to lay hold of any person or thing in order to use it*". It can also mean "*to take, receive, or pass on to be received, selected,*" Jesus "*lambano,*" takes and receives the bread from his Father. "*Through your goodness,*" says the priest at Mass, "*we have lambano, taken and received the bread we offer you.*"

In the bread, Jesus took and received all of creation from his Father. When the bread is then transformed into his body, it is true, it is only that little piece of bread which is literally transformed. This is an image of the great and definitive transformation by which Jesus comes to *make the whole universe into his body*. He wants to "unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10). Saint Paul uses the word *anakephalaioo*: to unite under one head. God's purpose is fulfilled in the fullness of time. That is, *Anakephalaiosis* -- the summing up. Literally "to restore in the new heaven and new earth all things in Christ. Ephesians 1:10 Jesus wants to integrate everything. He is truly "catholic": he wants to be all in all.

Every Eucharistic transformation is a step on the way toward that universal transformation where everything in the end shall be incorporated into the Body of Christ. "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:28).

By the fact that the bread refers to the whole of mankind and the whole cosmos, every Eucharist is a symbolic anticipation of that total integration when Jesus comes again. When we look at the priest *In persona Christi capitis*, "in the person of Christ the head" taking the bread in his hands before the transformation, we ought to be aware of the fact that the Father places all of creation into the hands of the Son so that he will *transform it into his body and thus divinize it*.

We cry, "māran āthā!" Maranatha - Lord Jesus, Come!

Excerpts from "Bread That Is Broken" by Wilfrid Stinissen (c) 1989 Ignatian Press

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus."

Philip went and told Andrew;

then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them,

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Amen, amen, I say to you,

unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,

it remains just a grain of wheat;

but if it dies, it produces much fruit.

Whoever loves his life loses it,

and whoever hates his life in this world

will preserve it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me must follow me,

and where I am, there also will my servant be.

The Father will honor whoever serves me.

"I am troubled now. Yet what should I say?

'Father, save me from this hour'?

But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.

Father, glorify your name."

Then a voice came from heaven,

"I have glorified it and will glorify it again."

The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder;

but others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

Jesus answered and said,

"This voice did not come for my sake but for yours.

Now is the time of judgment on this world;

now the ruler of this world will be driven out.

And when I am lifted up from the earth,

I will draw everyone to myself."

He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

The Gospel of the Lord