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A meal like no other

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | Jun. 10, 2012 Spiritual Reflections

In an effort to stimulate the table conversation, the hostess at a recent dinner party asked each of her guests to share what they regarded as their favorite or most memorable meal experience. One young man said that the meal memory he most treasured was the grilled cheese sandwich he bought with money he had earned at his very first job. Knowing that he was, at last, paying his own way as an adult filled him with a sense of pride and satisfaction.

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Another guest shared an experience from her time in Paris when she and her fiancé boarded the famous Bateau Mouche and cruised the Seine while enjoying a three-course offering from a renowned French chef. Every aspect of the four-hour ride, from the beautiful views of the City of Lights to the food, the wine and the conversation, made hers a precious memory.

Hebrews 9:11-15

Matthew 14:12-16, 21-26

A guest who had been a Boy Scout remembered his favorite meal -- hobo hamburgers, foil-wrapped and cooked over a fire he had succeeded in starting without the aid of matches.

Two of the dinner guests had met while working in Africa. Their favorite meal was a dish called Chicken à la Maryland that was prepared for them at a national park lodge in Uganda. When they asked to be wakened early for a trip to view the animals at daybreak, they were told, ?But you just ate the rooster!?

A mother of three insisted that her favorite meal was one at which she did not eat anything. Feeding her newborn for the first time was an event she would always remember with reverence.

What meal has been your favorite and most memorable of all? Was it a birthday dinner? An anniversary celebration? A *quinceañera*? Or something simple, like a picnic in the park? Whatever your response, the feast we celebrate today challenges us to consider our sharing in the most holy body and blood of Christ as our all-time favorite repast. Sacrificial though it is, in its remembrance of the death of Jesus, this feast also affirms the gift of Jesus in the forms of bread and wine as authentic and necessary food.

To fully appreciate the significance of our Eucharistic sharing, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of the meal in the Hebrew tradition. Because food was regarded as God?s life-sustaining gift, the sharing of food

with others was tantamount to sharing God?s life together. Eating together and sharing God?s gift of life created a bond that would be upheld and protected at all costs. Because of its essential importance, the sharing of food was readily incorporated into religious rituals. Referenced in today?s sacred texts are the rituals associated with the covenant that Israel was privileged to share with God. The most important of these covenants, that of Sinai, was sealed with the sacrifice of an animal, the blood of which, or the life force, was sprinkled on the altar (symbolizing God) and on the gathered believers. Then a meal was shared, thus binding the covenantal partners together for life. Such a covenant was mediated by Moses in the desert to mark their Passover from slavery in Egypt to freedom in a land of their own. Yearly, this covenant was celebrated with a shared meal that affirmed their union with God and one another.

Christians understood that the saving, sacrificial death Jesus had effectively forged a new covenant between God and humankind. By virtue of the blood of Jesus, poured forth in love and forgiveness, and by virtue of Jesus? passage from death to life, sinners have been graced and empowered to pass from slavery to sin to freedom and to a new and unending covenantal relationship with God.

In his account of Jesus? last meal with his disciples, the Marcan evangelist relied heavily on the significance of the covenantal sacrifice and the sacred meal of Passover in order to affirm that Jesus, in his person and through his mission, was the one and the same. His was the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice. By our sharing in the bread and the wine that he identified as his very body and blood, we remember his saving sacrifice and we are fed by the meal that makes us who we are -- one with him, one with God, one with one another. It is easy to say that God gives food. Faith urges us to acknowledge that God is the food we need and Jesus has made this food, this sacred meal, available to all.

[Patricia Sánchez holds a master?s degree in literature and religion of the Bible from a joint degree program at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York.]

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