

Reflection

May 1, 2020

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Today, we've entered the month of May and with Hopkins, we may ask, "Why is May Mary's month?" With warmer weather, blue skies, flowers and birdsong, why not? It's better not to ask poetry too many questions.

There is another question today, however. Why is this first day of May, Mary's month, dedicated to St. Joseph the Worker? In Europe, Communist May Day celebrations for workers seem to have occasioned the day's "baptism" honoring Joseph, the Worker.

Beyond all of that, during this past week, our liturgy has focused on Eucharist – Jesus, the Bread of Life. Last Sunday, the disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized him in the breaking of the bread. In the subsequent weekdays, all of the Gospel texts came from John 6. Day after day, we have heard or read such phrases as: "seek the food that lasts;" "I am the Bread of Life;" "who eats will have life forever." Wednesday, on the feast of St. Catherine of Siena, who so loved the Eucharist, we heard: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

The theme repeats in today's text: "This is the bread that comes down from heaven." There is a certain irony in hearing all of these Eucharistic texts in an Easter Season visited by the coronavirus. For weeks now, we have been fed generously at the table of the Word, but not at the Eucharistic table. I have found myself reflecting more on the frequent mention of "communion."

We celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, but with more than six feet of social distancing. At the same time, we are realizing good things during these limitations. We realize the blessings of a house with closed circuit TV and sisters who know how to transmit our celebrations throughout the house and the community. We are becoming increasingly aware of the experiences and gifts of sisters who preside at Liturgy of the Word and share their reflections. They are all helping us remain in communion with one another.

Still, there remains the absence of the Eucharistic Liturgy and there was even the impossibility of receiving sacramental communion on those occasions when Mass was celebrated.

One day, when we were invited to a quiet time of "communion" at the end of the Liturgy of the Word, my mind started toying with that notion of "spiritual communion." Isn't *all* communion spiritual? Yes, but not sacramental. What communion are we talking about?

Of course, we are talking about communion with Christ and his word expressed in the liturgy. But communion with Christ also means communion with everyone. He taught quite clearly that what we do or fail to do for one another we do or fail to do for him.

In a strange and troubling way, the pandemic has, in one way, isolated us, yet in another way, it has placed us all in communion and awareness of people throughout the whole world, anywhere and everywhere. Just as Vatican II taught us that our sacramental communion during the Eucharistic celebration is no longer focused only on a one to one relationship with Jesus, so here, we are celebrating and entering into communion with all.

For now, we can't gather in a common space and can't receive sacramental communion, but we *can remain* in communion. God is at the center, and communion does not have walls or borders. As we enter into the silence of prayerful communion, we are united with people we know and love and with all people of the world; we are with those who are suffering and those who are so generously helping them. We are in supportive communion with the scientists who seek a vaccine and a cure and we are in communion with all of creation which is intended to exist in harmony.

We return then to this, our own place, where at the center, whether in Chapel or on the TV screen, the Bread of Life is in our midst, giving strength for the journey and we continue our journey in communion.