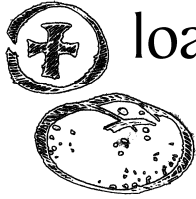


We all  
partake of  
the one  
loaf



© J. S. Paluch Co., Inc.

THE MOST HOLY BODY & BLOOD OF CHRIST

May 25, 2008

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16

I Corinthians 10:16-17

John 6:51-58

Fr. Vince Alagia, S.J.

## Remember Your Name

At a high school graduation a valedictorian addressed her senior class with this advice: When you go out into the world, *"remember your name."*

She explained that her parents always repeated this phrase when she left the house during the years of growing up. It was not because they feared she would forget she her family name, but a *reminder to hold fast to the ideals and character that defined her family*. With this reminder her parents called her to live outside the house by the same principles that defined her behavior inside the house. *"Remember your name"* gave this young woman a sense of who she was, and helped shape her integrity and values. As we listen to graduation addresses, I believe we cannot help but find ourselves hearing those encouraging words and wondering what has happened to us since.

It is good advice. To remember our name even as we have striven and continue to strive to wed ideals with the practical world in which we live. To remember who we are, to whom we belong, to realize how good it is to be surrounded always in spirit by those who share values, waiting and encouraging and praying and hoping the best for us.

It is good counsel for a graduation, when a student is leaving the safety of home to go into the world for a lifetime. Good advice for anyone leaving the safety of their own home to go into the world for just a few hours. And this is just the kind of advice which Paul gave the Corinthian Church in our epistle reading today. Paul speaks of the Lord's Table, of our communion with Christ through the bread and wine, in a manner similar to that young graduate

commencement speaker's call. In effect, Paul was saying, *"When you partake of the Lord's Table, you are part of a special family. So remember your name, and allow that identity to bind you to your true family, and separate you from the world of compromise."*

Our epistle lesson occurs in the context of a chapter where the Apostle is encouraging the Corinthians to distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbors in the matter of idolatry. Many of those Corinthians had been converted to Christian faith from a life of idol worship, but they still lived in a city where idol worship was a pervasive presence, and trying to take their name away from them. Food purchased in open-air markets was often the left-over meat from idol sacrifices in the pagan temples. The Romans and the Greeks had a pantheon of gods to worship, and even the Roman government and Caesar were worshipped as a new cult. Much of this idol worship seemed harmless, magic, part of their tradition, and patriotism than religion. Is our world that much different today?

Paul considered the implications for the fledging Church to be profound. He strongly urged the fledgling Church community to take a stand at this point. They had one loyalty, one God. Paul knew that the Church's witness and uniqueness could not survive in that culture if they became absorbed by the idolatry of Corinth.

Paul used the Lord's Table to illustrate his point. When we participate in the Mass, we do not simply partake in a ritual action. Paul knew that the Lord's Table was a mystical union with the body and blood of Christ. Mysterious, yes, and no less real. No matter the simplicity and commonness of the elements, this table forms the centerpiece as church, of our identity with God and our devotion to Him. One cannot leave the Lord's Table and go dine fully again at the table of the world's fare as well. It is a choice. An identity. If we eat at the Lord's Table, we are members of the Lord's family. So, when we leave this Table and this service, and go out into the world, let us "remember our name."

The other context for Paul's counsel to the Corinthians was his plea for them to find a new level of trust, care, and love for each other in the Christian community. The Corinthian's were plagued by a number of divisive issues that

threatened the Church's internal cohesiveness, and thus its effectiveness in the world. Some of them were at odds over various theological and interpretive issues. And others were offending the common good by their over-zealous use of their spiritual gifts in worship. In addition, the congregation had divided loyalties over leadership within the group. Some preferred Paul, others Peter and another called Appolos. And as we know all too well, division and distrust within the Church weakens the confidence and sense of community that is so vital for the Church's work and witness.

These were sensitive issues and crucial ones for the Church, and highly threatening to her stability and effectiveness. Where did Paul find their coherent center in the midst of this chaos? *At the Lord's Table*. Whatever else divided or distracted them, the Apostles called the Church to remember their common bond in the Body and Blood of Christ. Their unity in Him overshadowed all the forces that would drive them apart. Paul believed that the Table of the Lord was the bridge between divided parishioners, the salve for hurting hearts, and the common ground for theological debate. When we, the Church, share at this table, partake of this one mysterious communion with Christ, and claim our true identity in the family of God around the Table, then, as Paul reasoned, this same sacred Meal would remind the Church of their special relationship with each other as well. We do not partake of the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ alone but in communion with the saints, both past and present, both local and global.

So, let us come to the Table of the Lord with grateful hearts for this blessing in our lives. Come with open minds for the mystery of this special communion with God. Come with extended hands of trust and forgiveness to each other in the communion of saints. And here, around this table, let us *"remember the name"* and share it in the name of the Lord, our Lord, and Savior.

So, let us pray together in our hearts:

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.  
May your body and blood be my food and drink.  
May your passion and death be my strength and life.  
Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given.

May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.  
Let me not run from the love which you offer,  
But hold me safe from the forces of evil.  
On each of my dyings shed your light and your love.  
Keep calling me until that day comes,  
When, with your saints, I may praise you forever. Amen.\*

\*Hearts on Fire: Praying with the Jesuits. Ed. Michael Harter, SJ (Inst. SJ Sources. St. Louis, Mo) p 7.