

With Burning Hearts

In his book “With Burning Hearts,” the popular and honored priest and spiritual writer Fr. Henri Nouwen offers a beautiful reflection on the meaning of the Eucharist for ourselves and our communities. He presents us with a deeper understanding of the Eucharist through the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus as presented in this Sunday’s gospel (Luke 24:13-35). Nouwen goes beyond the basic understanding of the Eucharist, and presents this gift in terms of our relationship with Christ and with each other. He focuses on five main aspects of the Eucharist: **Loss, Presence, Invitation, Communion, and Mission.**

Loss (A Cry for Help)

Along with the joys of daily life, the losses that settle deep in our minds and hearts are many: death, suffering, pain, sickness, and all kinds of trials and tribulations (as we see and experience with the current Coronavirus Pandemic). The question is: What do we do with our losses? Do we hide them? Do we act as if they aren’t real? Are we overcome by them? Do we blame someone else for them? **There is another possibility** . . . to allow our losses to dismantle our feelings of security and safety, and lead us to the painful truth of our brokenness. But in the midst of this pain there is a gentle but reassuring voice. It is the voice of **the one** who says: “Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.” Like the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, recognizing that our hearts are broken by the many “losses” in life is often the first step on our Eucharistic journey. The question is whether our losses lead to **resentment** or **gratitude**. The word Eucharist means “thanksgiving.” To celebrate the Eucharist and lead a Eucharistic life has everything to do with **gratitude**; especially gratitude and thanks for Christ’s gift of Himself to us.

Presence (The Word of God)

Do we approach the Liturgy of the word, the words of consecration, and the Eucharistic prayer with an open mind and heart expecting them or allowing them to surprise us or touch us? The word of God is sacramental, it is sacred . . . and as a sacred word it makes present what it indicates. When Jesus spoke to the two disciples on the road and explained to them the words of Scripture that were about Himself, their **hearts** began to **burn**. In other words, they **experienced** His real **presence**. Where else can **we experience the real presence** of God more completely than in the Eucharist?

Invitation (True Belief)

Maybe we are not used to thinking about the Eucharist as an **invitation** to Jesus to “stay with us.” We are more inclined to think about Jesus inviting us to His house, His table, His meal. **But Jesus wants to be invited.** He never forces Himself on us . . . unless we invite Him, He will always remain a stranger. We go beyond just walking into His

presence when we **invite** Him into our life and dare to open ourselves to communion with Him. The two disciples on the Road to Emmaus invited Jesus to stay with them. Jesus was their guest, but when He entered their home, He became their host as He **invited** them to enter into **full communion** with Him through the **breaking of the bread**.

Communion (Take and Eat)

In the Eucharist, Jesus gives Himself unconditionally to us. It is *Agape* love, the kind of love that brings about true communion. And it is the word **communion** that contains the truth that, in and through Jesus, God wants not only to teach us, instruct us, or inspire us, but **to become one with us**. **Communion** creates community. Our **participation in the inner life of God** leads us to a new way of **participation in each other's lives**. It is fashioned by the Holy Spirit, and manifests itself in very concrete ways: in forgiveness, reconciliation, mutual support, outreach to people in need, solidarity with all who suffer, and an ever increasing concern for justice and peace. This communion not only creates community, but **communion** always leads to mission.

Mission (Giving and Receiving)

Life lived Eucharistically is always a life of **mission**. After breaking bread with Jesus, the two disciples did not remain in Emmaus. "With burning hearts," they returned to Jerusalem to tell everyone the story about what had happened to them on the road, and how they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. We come to realize that **mission** is not only about helping others, and telling others about the risen Lord, but also about receiving witness from those to whom we are sent. **It is not just about giving, but also about receiving**. If it is true that the Spirit of God blows where it wills, there is no person who cannot give that Spirit..

In summary, it is a recognition of these five aspects of the Eucharist: **loss, presence, invitation, communion, and mission** that enable us to live a **Eucharistic life**...a life in which everything becomes a way of saying "Thank you" to Him who joins us on the road.