

LIFE AND WELL-BEING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

CORPUS CHRISTI SUNDAY

When a loaf transfigures

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Today's readings: Exodus 19:2-6a; Psalm 100:1-5; Romans 5:6-11; Mark 1:15; Matthew 9:36-10:8

Perhaps one of the most celebrated loaves in western literature appears in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Having stolen a loaf to feed his starving sister and children, Jean Valjean spends 19 years in prison. Released on parole, he is given a yellow identification as a former convict, which only worsens his condition as he is forced to the margins of society.

As the story goes, Valjean is welcomed into the home of Bishop Myriel. There he steals the prelate's silverware. Arrested by the police, the bishop claims it was he who gifted Valjean with his silver, immediately adding also the candlesticks as gifts left there by Valjean, while leading him out on his way.

Later in the novel we are told that this encounter proved to be more than a moment of transformation for Valjean. It was indeed a transfigurative one. Jean's life emerges as marked by compassion; he fathers an orphan and becomes a benefactor to the poor, to the extent that Inspector Javert, all intent to catch him red-handed to throw him again in

jail, admits that Jean is "more nearly akin to an angel than to a man".

This was possible thanks to the bishop's act, which cannot just be reduced to one of charitable compassion and mercy. It is much deeper than that. It constitutes a subversive act of someone who categorically refuses to participate in a corrupted legal, social and political system which creates victims and thrives on those who consciously or unconsciously sustain it by their direct and indirect collaboration.

This act is the novel's foundational political moment, which triggers transfiguration, a theologically heavy term implying a radical transformation of the present state of affairs. For Victor Hugo, shaped by a Catholic cultural world, the loaf is not just bread; it carries, even on Catholic tables, Eucharistic weight.

We all remember our forebears signing the loaf with a cross before breaking it for meals. Catholic culture gave rise to creative cuisine of savoury and sweet recipes made of bread leftovers which shouldn't be wasted, as it is gravely sinful to throw away bread. Think of our local *puđina* or the French *pain perdu*!

Considering this subtle Eucharistic framework, candlesticks included, symbolising worship on the altar, something deeper happens in the aforementioned foundational moment. Firstly, a condemnation of a society that shapes its own collapse and the conditions it later punishes; secondly, that a

Eucharistic church (embodied by the bishop) resists social and political corruption, to embody a different social order reflecting the ideal of "a new heaven and a new earth". Alms alone are not sufficient.

In today's gospel, Jesus declares: "I am the living bread coming down from heaven." Those who nourish themselves by the Eucharistic body and blood, the real sacramental symbol of Christ giving himself to incorporate us in his own life and transfigure us in his true living body, the Church, are the ones who live by the ideals Christ faces us with; a gift he extends to us capable of changing those who receive it as the society they inhabit.

In consumerist society, where the crafty logic of the survival of the fittest devastates both our physical and spiritual well-being, partakers in the Eucharistic table of the Lord are bound to change their mindset and their ways or not approach the Sacred Table at all, lest they sacrilegiously consume their own judgement.

We do not approach the Eucharist habitually to be comforted but to commit ourselves to efficacious transfiguration into the likeness of Christ, his values, choices and priorities. The Eucharist, as hinted by the Apostle in the second reading, is a catalyst in forming a new humanity founded on justice according to God, running in an inverse sense to the corrupt logic of the world.

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QUOTES & NEWS

~~Family based on man and woman~~

~~In a video message to a symposium in Brazil, Pope Leo XIV described the family as a "unique community of persons formed by a man and a woman". On May 25, the pope had also told members of the EU Parliament that the family is "founded on marriage between a man and a woman".~~

~~Humanity's search for truth~~

~~Addressing members of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation, Pope Leo said:~~

~~"Indeed, it is precisely when faced with adverse circumstances that the human person is called to reconsider the fundamental questions that have gently prodded the heart of countless generations to more serious reflection: 'Where are we going? Toward what goal do we wish to orient ourselves? What direction should we choose as a people and as a human community?'"~~

~~"Such questions are a clear manifestation of humanity's search for truth and give rise to a desire for something more, a thirst for God and lasting meaning. They also bear witness to the essential aspects of our hu-~~