

Corpus Christi 2008

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I've never been a big fan of "angel food" You know those angel food cakes that have nothing to them. Yes they are light and sweet but do they satisfy" They certainly don't fill you up! There really is no "substance" to angel food!

Give me devil's food any day. Those rich, deep, satisfying chocolate cakes that have taste and texture. Now there's a food with real substance! I infinitely prefer Devil's food to Angel's food.

Why this culinary comparison on the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ? Panis Angelicus, angelic bread, food from heaven. That is what the Eucharist has been called. The tradition of "food from heaven goes back to the wandering of the Israelites in the desert. When they were hungry and cried out to God, they were given "manna" which means "What's this stuff" But beggars can't be choosers and although they tired after a while of the daily diet of the white, sweet stuff at least it kept them alive. Manna was a gift from the heavens, undeserved, freely given. It was meant to be enough for them.

Panis angelicus/ Angel food/ bread from heaven. A beautiful spiritual reality but is it enough for us, mere mortals not angels, more devils than angels. We are created, flesh and blood folks who need something of substance! Of course in the early centuries of the church, the Eucharist was something of substance. It was the real stuff of life and the staff of life. It was real bread, home made by the people (the laity) Lots of bread and wine were brought to the Assembly of God's people. These were the gifts that would nourish people spiritually and physically. The bread and wine that was not used for the Eucharist was distributed among the people who would remember where it came from as they ate and drank. Another kind of Eucharist in their homes. It was the real thing, this bread and wine. And as they prayed in memory of Jesus and his life, death and resurrection this bread of life and cup of salvation became so much more. As Paul says, Is not the cup we drink a participation in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread we break a participation in the body of Christ? For early Christians, not only was the bread broken and the wine poured out something of "substance", a communion with the real presence of Christ but it was also the rich, deep, satisfying communion with their fellow believers! The connection between the Eucharistic food and drink and those who ate and drank was so profound. As Augustine would say "Be who you see, receive who you are"

Panis angelicus! Angel food! Beautiful spiritual reality meant to remind us of the source of our nourishment. Awesome reality and free gift, sharing in the divine life in this eucharistic bread and wine. However there was a problem. This focus on the spiritual reality, angelic food dominated the real substance of Eucharist. Through the centuries, the emphasis on the spiritual reality made the church lose sight of the corporeal, "bodily" reality. The real bread became tasteless, insubstantial "angel food". The cup was taken away from the people. Only the clergy were deemed worthy to fully participate. The laity

were mere spectators at the Eucharist. They (the people, the laity) were nothing of "substance". There was nothing much to them.

Panis Angelicus! The times they are a changin! For the past forty years the church has been trying to recover the rich, deep, profoundly satisfying experience of eating and drinking in memory of Jesus, standing at the table as the body of Christ. We are in a time of recovery. We are trying to recover the origins of Eucharist. And yet there is resistance. Many in the hierarchy and in the community prefer 'angel food" They want the Eucharist to be only "spirit" and not the "Flesh and blood of Christ" in a real sense. The temptation has always been to deny our human reality that God so totally embrace in the flesh and blood of Jesus. "For my flesh is real food" and my blood is real drink". We are still struggling to make our Eucharist something more than a private affair. We are the body of Christ. The awesome reality that we celebrate is not only the gift of his body and blood but who we are as his body and blood in the world. Can we really say "AMEN" to that awesome reality. Angel food, yes but also the stuff of life, the staff of life, our lives broken and shared for so that God's kingdom will come.