



MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

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BREAD FOR THE JOURNEY

By Sister Mary Beverly, HSM

Where did you first hear or read the phrase “bread for the journey”? In the book of Exodus, we read the dramatic story of how God, with Moses as their leader, led the Israelites out of slavery after 400 years in Egypt. Then, because of their complaints against God and Moses, God punished them by not taking them directly to the Promised Land. They spent 40 years making the trip. One of the complaints was that they did not have enough water, so God provided that miraculously from the rock, not once but twice. The people also complained that there was not enough food and were afraid they would starve to death, so God provided food from heaven. When the Israelites saw the fine flakes on the ground after the dew evaporated in the morning, they said in Hebrew, “Man hu?” which means “What is it?” Hence we get our English word “manna”. Manna was “bread for the journey” which God miraculously provided for his people every day for 40 years.

The manna was more than just miraculous bread from heaven. It was the sign of God’s fidelity to his promise to give them their own land. It was based on the covenant that God was their God and they were

his people. One aspect of the manna, which we often forget, is that one “omer” (measure) was kept in a vessel in the Ark of the Covenant, so that future generations would be able to see the heavenly bread. Manna was kept to be seen, so that the miracle of God’s presence and fidelity would be remembered. Once the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, entered the Promised Land, and ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased. Manna was bread from heaven, bread for the journey, bread for the way home. Once the desert journey was over, God fed the Israelites from the Promised Land, their new homeland.

The Jewish rabbis had many teachings and beliefs about the manna. One point was that in the age to come the Messiah would be a new Moses. The Messiah would bring down manna from heaven to be daily bread in the new kingdom. They referred to this as the “Manna of the Messiah”. Jesus, as we know, was the longed for Jewish Messiah, the Anointed One, come down to earth from God. He did indeed give us new manna from heaven: his own body. “I myself am the bread of life. He who eats this bread will live forever. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they died. He who eats the bread that I will give will live forever.” (See Jn. 6) Many times in the Bread of Life Discourse in Chapter 6 of St. John’s Gospel, Jesus makes reference to the Old Testament manna, to make it clear to his Jewish hearers that he is the new Moses and that he is the true bread from heaven. He clearly states that this is real food and real flesh and therefore not merely symbolic.

As Catholics, all of this is familiar to us. We believe that at Mass when the priest lays his hands over the bread and wine (a reference to the dew which fell upon the ground leaving the manna) the Holy Spirit brings about transubstantiation. The substance of bread is transformed into the body of Christ. The substance of wine is transformed into the blood of Christ. When we receive communion, the priest asks us to affirm our faith and we assent with

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our “Amen”. When the consecrated host is displayed in the monstrance on the altar, we, like the Israelites of old, can see the heavenly bread. With eyes of faith, we acknowledge that this is not earthly bread. We genuflect, we kneel down, we cross ourselves when the Blessed Sacrament passes us by in procession, such as on Holy Thursday. Indeed, this is heavenly bread and we believe it is Jesus, the Son of God.

However, there is one important aspect with which I want to conclude this article. It is a point possibly most often forgotten in our usual practice of the faith. We fondly prepared for and remember our first holy communion, but what about our last communion? Have we told our family members or close friends or caregivers that we want to receive Jesus before we die? Have we thought about and made provision for the “bread for the journey”? What is the last communion called? “Viaticum.” This is a Latin word which means “with you on the way”. So our last holy communion is the bread which sustains us on our last journey. No one can accompany us through the door of death which leads to eternal life but Jesus. He died so we could die in him, and he rose from the dead, so we could rise with him also.



This is the crux of the celebration of Easter. Jesus rose and ascended into heaven, so he could lead us to our new homeland. When we eat ordinary food, we change it into ourselves. It becomes part of our body. When we receive holy communion, Jesus changes us so we that we can live his resurrected life forever.

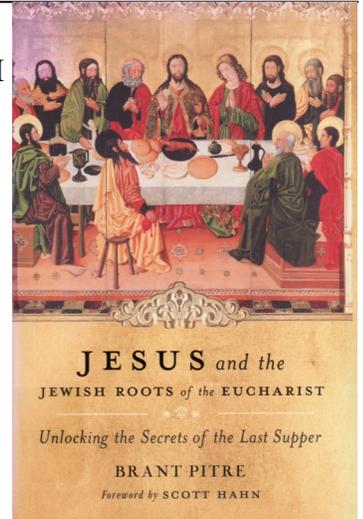
May we approach Easter this year with deeper faith, greater joy and real anticipation in the life of heaven to which we are called.

NOTE: This article is a very brief summary of the class I taught at Sacred Heart parish in Boise on April 5, 2022. In turn, the presentation was a short version of a two hour class which I gave at Nazareth Retreat Center in Boise in April, 2012. This biblical material is a summary of Chapter 4 from the book *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* by Dr. Brant Pitre published by Doubleday.

COMMUNITY NEWS

By Sister Mary Beverly, HSM

RECOMMENDED: As I mentioned above, I have used this book extensively for private study and for teaching. It is profound and moving, informative and inspiring. Dr. Pitre is a great teacher because he can take what is so deeply Jewish and traditional and make Scripture understandable for us non-scholars. Contact me, if you want to borrow this book from the Marymount Hermitage library.



DAY OF PILGRIMAGE: Nancy VanDyken, an Orthodox iconographer, will be presenting two classes on the theme “Praying with Icons” for the group mini-retreat on Saturday, May 21. See details on the website: marymount-hermitage.org in the **Calendar of Events**. Registration is required to attend and limited to 35 people. Please contact me by phone or email to register before May 16, 2022.

RENOVATIONS BEGUN: The hermitage named *Mary’s House*, where Father Bill McCann currently resides, has a new roof. The hermitage named *House of His Name* will soon have a new brown roof also. The hermitage named *St. Francis* has been emptied out and is ready for the interior renovation planned for that building. Thanks for your prayers for the success of this major work and safety for the workers.

EASTER MESSAGE: Bishop Peter Christensen, Bishop of Boise, along with all US bishops, is proposing three years of Eucharistic renewal. The theme in our diocese this year is “Remain in Me”. I hope my short, simple reflection will help your own prayer and deepening devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist. Happy, holy Easter! God bless you and yours.

The MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER is published by Marymount Hermitage, Inc., a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation in the State of Idaho. The Hermit Sisters of Mary are a canonically approved, Catholic community of women hermits, following the Rule of St. Benedict. The newsletter is published each month by the 15th on our website only. The purpose of the newsletter is to share the spirituality and material progress of Marymount Hermitage. Please pray that we may be faithful to our way of life in prayer and penance, solitude and silence for the sake of the Church and the world. Donations are sincerely appreciated and are tax-deductible. Thank you in advance to those who have remembered Marymount Hermitage in their wills. God bless you!