

Body & Blood A - 2026

Holy Living

Years ago, Harry Emerson Fosdick, then at the height of his influence as minister of the Riverside Church, New York City, was making a tour of Palestine and other countries of the Near and Middle East. He was invited to give an address at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, where the student body comprised citizens of many countries and representatives from sixteen different religions. What could one say that would be relevant or of interest to so mixed and varied a group? This is how Fosdick began: "I do not ask anyone here to change his religion; but I do ask all of you to face up to this question: **What is your religion doing to your character?**"

This was a call to consider one of the great issues of human belief: religion and life, Christianity and character, word and spirit. Emerson once said, "**What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear a word you say.**" Jesus' discourse in this whole sixth chapter of the Gospel of John had two foci - spirit and life. "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." By this he meant that those who appropriated his spirit, i.e., fed upon him as the bread of life, would find, thereby, a fulfillment and satisfaction no other means could give. The traditions of the world of his time, of course, had a different emphasis.

Retelling the Story:

On a hill near Cape Town, South Africa, just below the famed Table Mountain, a gun is fired every day at noon. The hill is known as Signal Hill. The firing of the gun once served a beautiful purpose. It signaled that a ship, on its way to or from India, had arrived in the harbor with a cargo of goods, and was in need of supplies of food and fresh water. A beautiful exchange resulted. There was receiving and giving. But that was a long time ago. The purpose no longer exists. Yet the gun is still fired dutifully every day. However, the firing is now little more than an empty ritual. Once it had a beautiful meaning. Now the meaning has gone out of it. Most of the local people ignore it. Visitors are told, "If you hear a loud bang at mid-day, don't worry. It's only the gun going off." However, the ritual still has one thing going for it. **Most people know the story behind it.** If that story were to be lost, then the ritual would become poorer still. — The Eucharist celebrates a wonderful event: the gift which Jesus made of his life on our behalf. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we tell that story again. But like anything that is repeated over and over again, there is a danger that it may become just a ritual. (Flor McCarthy in *New Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies*': quoted by Fr. Kayala). (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>)

The Eucharistic piety that converted St. Elizabeth Ann Seton:

Two hundred years ago, a beautiful, young, Episcopalian woman accompanied her husband, a merchant, to Italy, leaving four of their five children at home with family members. They had sailed for Italy, hoping that the change in climate might help her husband, whose failing business had eventually affected his health adversely. Tragically, he died in Livorno. The grieving young woman was warmly received by an Italian family, business acquaintances of her deceased husband. She stayed with them for three months before she could arrange to return to America. The

young widow was very impressed by the Catholic faith of her host family, especially their devotion to the Holy Eucharist: their frequent attendance at Mass, the reverence with which they received Holy Communion, the awe they showed toward the Blessed Sacrament on feast days when the Eucharist was carried in procession. She found her broken heart healed by a hunger for this mysterious presence of the Lord, and, upon returning home, requested instruction in Catholic Faith. Soon after being received into the Church, she described her first reception of the Lord in the Eucharist as the happiest moment of her life. — It was in St. Peter's Square on September 14, 1975, that Pope St. Paul VI canonized this woman, Elizabeth Ann Seton, as the first native-born saint of the United States. The Eucharist for her was a sign and cause of union with God and the Church. (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>).

Abiding with Christ

Eat this Bread and you will live, he promises. But even more than that, eat this Bread and I will abide with you, and you will abide with me. I like that word abide. I have pictures again: look, can you see them? They are images of home, of dwelling, of staying with, of living in and with, of trusting and being there. To abide is to know that no matter what comes our way, we will not be deserted nor left to face whatever the matter is on our own. Christ comes to live within us, to take up residence in our spirits, and promises not to leave.

Over the years I have witnessed many scenes of this abiding presence played out in the lives of persons I have known. None are more powerful, more moving, more meaningful than the images which walk across my mind of faithful spouses who care for each other to the very end. Let me draw them for you. There is one now, walking his wife, a victim of Alzheimer's disease, down the streets in front of the nursing home. She in a wheelchair, not knowing a thing. He pushing her faithfully day after day. Their love of more than 60 years abides in his heart. Here is another: the picture of a woman standing beside the bed of her husband, holding a hand, offering a calm, reassuring voice to this one who has only moments before been thrown into convulsions. "I will not leave you." Finally, here is the unspoken presence of a Loving Friend who calms my own grieving spirit in the dark hospital room where my father lays dying. "Those who eat my flesh? abide in me, and I in them (John 6:56, NRSV)."

In a world of fast-food chains in every village, of drive-through windows, of buffet lines and all-you-can-eat salad bars, we are today offered a different food, the Bread of Life. It is food for a hungry soul. It is eternal food which, when you eat it, satisfies the craving of your heart and opens your eyes to see that all else is imitation and second rate.

(by Larry M. Goodpaster from *Like a Breath of Fresh Air*, CSS Publishing Company)