



From the Pastor
The Nativity of the Lord
[Christmas]
December 25, 2022

"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE." As you may

know, these bulletin articles have been devoted to the USA Bishops' **National Eucharistic Revival** document **The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church**. This 3-year revival should help us better understand and celebrate our **Lord's Real Presence** in the **Eucharist**. This is part 20 in our series; for past articles on this **Revival**, the whole document, and a link to our Bishop's series on the Eucharist, go to our parish website – stjustin.org.

A MANGER BED? Mel Gibson's 2004 movie, **The Passion of the Christ**, still shocks many by its very realistic rendition of what some say may be the most excruciating form of execution. [The word 'excruciating' is derived from the word 'crucify!'] Just as the many 'watered-down' depictions of the **Crucifixion** lessen its severity and brutality, our saccharine **Nativity scenes** or 'cleaned-up' **Christmas Creches** do the same to the **Infancy Narrative in Saint Luke's Gospel**. [Saint **Matthew's Gospel** only mentions **Christ's Nativity** in passing; neither **Saint Mark** nor **Saint John** record it.] What might our image of **Christ's manger** be misinterpreting or misrepresenting?

A **manger** is an animal's feeding trough, usually filled with dirt-encrusted straw, the saliva [and **God** knows what else!] from the animals who ate out of it, mold, bugs, and other critters. It is certainly **NOT** the most hygienic, germ-free place for a newborn child to sleep! Perhaps our **Blessed Mother** and **Saint Joseph**, being poor and on the road, had no other options and were grateful for a sheltered, warm site to cradle "**little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay**." However, some suggest that based on themes that run through **Saint Luke's Gospel**, the evangelist-physician - who wrote a **Gospel** and, many believe, the **Church's** first biblical history book, **Acts of the Apostles**, and who was a Greek doctor - may have been trying to teach us some very important lessons!

The most obvious lesson is: **God** identifies with the poor and knows their pain, for - in **Jesus** - He felt their hunger and experienced their rejection. So, **Saint Luke's Gospel** highlights **Jesus'** concern for the outcast and stranger, the marginalized and hopeless. However, there are two more

pressing themes that pervade **Saint Luke's Gospel**.

JESUS: OUR SACRIFICIAL LAMB. Luke's Gospel begins and ends in **Jerusalem's Temple**, the site of sacrifice, where an **Angel** tells **Zechariah** he will be **John the Baptist's** father. [Luke 1:5-25] **Luke's Gospel** ends with the **Apostles** "**continually in the temple praising God**." [Luke 24:53] No wonder the symbol for **Luke's Gospel** is a **winged ox**: the animal sacrificed to atone for sins. **Luke** has no ox or ass at **Christ's crib**; **Saint Francis** added them to his **Creche** based on this quote: "**An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master's manger; But Israel does not know, my people has not understood**." [Isaiah 1:3] Hopefully, we are not as dumb - nor as stubborn as were our ancestors-in-faith!

LUKE EMPHASISES THE EUCHARIST. All three synoptic [**same eye**] Gospels [Matthew, Mark & Luke] record the **Last Supper** in detail; **John's Gospel** only focuses on **Jesus** washing the **Apostles'** feet, but devotes **Chapter 6**, the **Bread of Life Discourse**, on the **Eucharist's** significance. However, **Luke** records the most 'meals' - 12 in all - in which **Jesus** was the host or guest - stressing how He ate with the **rich** and **poor**, **friend** [Martha, Mary & Lazarus] and **foe** [Pharisees who despised Him]; **saint** [Apostles] and **sinner** [tax collectors & prostitutes]; **crowds** [4,000 & 5,000 at the multiplication of loaves] and **one-on-one** [Zacchaeus] - and these meals occurred **before** and **after** His **Death** and **Resurrection!**

Only **Luke** records our **Blessed Mother's** words in her **Magnificat**: "**The hungry he has filled with good things**." [Luke 1:53a] - which were fulfilled by the **Risen Lord** on **Easter** night with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "**Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread**." [Luke 24:35] Although **Jesus** made a shoreline post-Easter breakfast for the **Apostles** [John 21:1-14], only **Luke** tells how the **Risen Lord** ate baked fish in their presence. [Luke 24:42-43]

So, as we put the image of **Baby Jesus** in His **manger bed** and add some **blessed straw** from our **Parish's Creche**, may it remind us to 'feed' on **Christ's Eucharistic Presence** often. That way, every time we receive **Holy Communion**, we can enjoy a little '**taste of Christmas!**' **Merry Christmas** and a blessed, healthy **New Year 2023!**

In Christ

Father Mark