

**Reflections Given by Sister Monica Murphy, CSJ, at the CSJ Associate Commitment Liturgy  
(June 14, 2009)**

When it was mealtime on Southwest Airlines, the flight attendant politely asked the passenger, “Would you like dinner?” The passenger responded, “What are my choices?” “Yes or no,” replied the attendant.

We are so spoiled when it comes to endless choices. I remember talking with a sister who had recently returned from living in Peru, and she told me how overwhelmed she was on her first trip to a supermarket. Just looking at the array of cereals was more than she could handle. I think that our fundamental *yes* or *no* can get lost in all the choices we are asked to make. Once we make the broader choice and say our *yes* to being a loving person, all the smaller decisions will flow.



Today’s feast is about a choice “to take and eat, for this is my body; take and drink, for this is the blood of the new covenant.” Today is the feast that calls us to eat the bread, but in a broader context, the day calls us to *live* the Eucharist. Today is all about covenants and promise. How fitting it is that this is the day that our associates renew their promises.

On this feast, formerly known as the feast of Corpus Christi and now known as the feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus, I would like to share a story about bread that touches on the meaning of this day. Farrell La Guardia was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and during all of World War II. He was adored by many New Yorkers who took to calling him the “Little Flower” because he was so short and always wore a carnation in his lapel. La Guardia was a colorful character; he rode the New York City fire trucks, raided the city’s speakeasies with the police department, took entire orphan-ages to baseball games, and when the New York newspapers went on strike, he got on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. La Guardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered, old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. The woman told La Guardia that her daughter’s husband had deserted her; her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. The shopkeeper, however, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. “It’s a real bad neighborhood, your honor,” the man told the mayor. “She has to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson.” La Guardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, “I have to punish you. The law makes no exceptions. \$10 or 10 days in jail.” Even as La Guardia pronounced the sentence, however, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous hat, saying, “Here is the \$10 fine which I now remit, and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom \$.50 for living in a town where a person has to steal bread, so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant.”

The following day, New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered woman who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. Fifty cents of that money was contributed by the grocery-store owner himself while some 70 petty criminals, individuals with traffic violations and New York City policeman, each of whom had just paid \$.50 for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor standing ovation.

Sympathy sees and says, "I'm sorry." Compassion sees and says "I'll help." When we learn the difference, we can make a difference through our own actions. The Gospel for today's feast cites distinct actions on the part of Jesus as he celebrates the Last Supper with his disciples and institutes the Eucharist. Bread was taken, blessed, broken and shared. These are the actions to which we are called in our life. *Jesus took the bread.* From the time of our baptism we have been chosen to be and become the extension of Christ in time. *Jesus blessed the bread.* To bless someone is to acknowledge his/her value, to speak well of him/her, to make him/her feel very special. Jesus prays for us, holds us up to the father, speaks well of us, desires the fullness of life for us. *Then Jesus broke the bread.* It is in our brokenness that we are most loved; it is not in our self-reliance or perfection. The Gospel does not say, "Come to me all who are perfect," but rather, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened."

Jesus is most at home with the weak, the vulnerable, the marginalized. The way Jesus lived in the world is how we are called to live today. Jesus accepts us as we are and believes in who we can become. Lastly, *Jesus gave the bread and the wine to eat and drink*, declaring that this was his body and his blood of the new covenant, broken and shared for us. We eat this food to be empowered to go out and become bread for the world. Do you ever remember when, as a child, you ate too many chocolate-chip cookies? Your mom would say, "If you don't stop eating those cookies, you'll turn into a chocolate-chip cookie." We become what we eat

In the Eucharist, through the prayers of the celebrant, the faith of the community and the power of the Spirit, this miracle of transforming love happens. Over and over this weekend, we have heard the song, "I See Myself in You." As sisters and associates, we continue the works begun over 200 years ago by Mother St. John. As Christians we continue the works begun over 2,000 years ago by Jesus, just as the Spirit empowered the early Christians and our founders to go forth and make a difference. With courage and deep faith, we join with all our sisters and associates around the world to live out our charism and to be faithful to our covenant.

The Eucharist, the feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus, which we celebrate today, is a miracle. Through the power of the Spirit, the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus, and we who receive it are sent forth to make a little piece of heaven happen here on earth.

Eat this bread. Live this Eucharist. Be signs of the covenant. Remember the choices are: *yes* or *no*.