

Fast food gets bad publicity. People complain that it lacks nutrition, that it is more expensive than eating at home, and that a longer meal would give time to prepare the food carefully, to eat it slowly, to appreciate its flavors, and to enter deep conversation with other people. A slow meal provides an experience of community life that fast food cannot achieve. It's popular to criticize fast food. But we all eat it. I stopped at Dairy Queen this afternoon.

We eat fast food because it does other things for us: it saves time preparing and cleaning up a meal, time we can spend doing other things to improve our homes or help a neighbor. Fast food shouldn't be a way of life, but it helps especially when we are on the go.

The Jewish Passover meal, the Seder, is slow. It takes place in a home and lasts several hours. The Christian eucharist evolved from this ceremonial meal with all its blessings, dialogues, and rituals. But the original Passover, as it is described in the Book of Exodus, didn't happen that way. It was not a long, drawn-out evening, when people savored course after course while engaging in witty conversation. The first Passover was fast food.

Listen to the instructions God gave the people: Slaughter a lamb or a goat at twilight. Sprinkle blood on the front door. Cook and eat the meat that same night – don't put it in a crock pot all day long so it's juicy and tender. Cook it quick. Eat unleavened bread. Don't put in yeast because it takes too long for dough to rise. Wear travel clothes, not loungewear. Put your shoes on. Eat with your walking staff in one hand. That's like saying eat with one hand on the steering wheel of your car. Prepare the food quickly, eat it quickly, and don't clean up. Just get out of there. In the first Passover, God gives a textbook defense of fast food.

Why? Pharaoh finally told the Israelites they could leave their captivity. This was the night they could flee their oppressors, cross the Red Sea, and start the long journey toward their own promised land. They ate fast because they were running for their lives.

We usually eat fast for other reasons. Maybe we haven't planned our day very well. We don't feel like cooking. We don't want to put up with complaints. We want everybody in the family to be happy with what they eat tonight, and we cannot guarantee everyone will like something we set on the table at home. Sometimes we eat fast for the wrong reasons.

But when we gather for the eucharist, we eat unleavened bread, a reminder that there is something about this meal, even though it seems long, that is quick. This meal warns us we should be running for our lives. Temptation is all around us: We are slaves to the false values of greed and lust, gluttony and anger. Our culture encourages us to misbehave on the internet, in the workplace and in the privacy of our homes. We have to run from that. But we need strength for this journey: unleavened bread and a sip of wine, consecrated by the Holy Spirit, to nourish us with the Body and Blood of Christ. So, let us be grateful for this meal. It gives us strength to run away from sins that try to make us slaves. Even though it takes little time to eat, it feeds us for eternity.