

Eating food always demands sacrifice. Processed foods and fast food make it appear that eating requires less work. You just pop something in the micro or pass by the drive-through window, and hot food is yours without all the fuss. But buying prepared food is more expensive than fixing it yourself, so it too demands a sacrifice. We don't often realize it. Prepared foods cost less time in the kitchen, but they cost more time at the workplace and money we could spend on something else.

We usually buy the bread we put on the table at home. But in other cultures, especially poor ones, people at home do the whole process themselves. A family grows wheat on their farm. They harvest their own grains and grind them into flour, perhaps by hand. Then they add water, shape the loaves and bake them. It requires a lot more time than picking up a loaf at Country Mart.

One Easter Sunday at the turn of the 5th century, St. Augustine told the newly baptized members of his community that the bread they shared at communion said a lot about who they are. He asked them, "Was this bread made of one grain of wheat? Weren't many grains required in its making? Yet before they became one loaf each grain existed separately. Only after they were crushed and mixed with water did they form one loaf. Unless wheat is ground into flour and moistened with water, it never reaches the stage of bread." Augustine says catechumens are ground up by fasting and the scrutinies, moistened by the water of baptism, and then formed into one bread, baked with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Bread is then broken so that many may eat of it. Christians, too, break ourselves in many ways, so that others may eat of the goodness of God.

When Jesus lifted up bread at the last supper, he raised a symbol of sacrifice. He was about to undergo his passion. He told us to eat and drink, but he also commanded us to serve.

The bread we share at church is like the bread we share at home. We don't always realize the sacrifice that brought it to the table, and we don't always appreciate the demands it makes when we eat it. But this is what bread is for.

We gather tonight because we believe in the real presence of Christ in this eucharistic bread and wine. We gather for the blessed joy of eating and drinking this spiritual meal, and to sacrifice ourselves for others, as Christ did for us.