

I have a friend who's into etymology--where words come from. When he graduated from school, the hosts of the banquet asked if I would offer a toast based on etymologies, so I looked up the origins of the word "toast". Here's what I learned.

"Toast" comes the Old French word, *toster*, which means "to toast." But that in turn comes from the Latin word *tostum*, the fourth principal part of the verb *torreo*, (*torrere*, *torrui*, *tostum*, for all you former Latin students out there). It means "to parch." Latin picked it up from a Sanscrit word *tarsh*, meaning "to thirst," where it slipped over to Greek as *tersomai*, "to become dry," and into German as *Durst*, from which we get our English word "thirst". The same root creeps into Italian in *torrefazione*, a word they use for the roasting of coffee, in Spanish as *tortilla*, and back into English for words like "torrid", "torrent", and the ever-popular "toaster".

Now, you may be wondering how a word which originally means thirst changed to mean exactly the opposite, the drink that quenches thirst. (Pause for dramatic effect.) You may also be wondering if I still remember that this is Holy Thursday. (Thirst-day?) Let me start fitting this together. In the middle ages they developed a custom at banquets honoring someone. They dipped a piece of hard toasted spice bread into wine for flavor, to symbolize the spice this person was for the community. So the word "toast" referred to the bread and wine which people drank in praise. The bread and wine. They spontaneously chose symbols we use in the eucharist to praise God.

A toast says something not just about the person honored, but about the people who lift the glass. We share a common respect for the honoree; we share the common influence of the honoree; we share a common mission to acclaim the honoree.

The eucharist is perhaps the richest of toasts. The one whom we honor is our maker, our redeemer, and our destiny. Moreover, in honoring God, we also commit to one another. At the Last Supper, Jesus lifted the greatest toast of all. He lifted himself, the vessel of his body and blood, in praise of God and for all to consume.

When we gather for eucharist, we come to "toast" God, but we discover something about ourselves. We discover we're not alone. God has spoken to everyone here, and we all want to praise God. Religion is not a private matter; it's a community matter. It calls for common faith, common worship, and common service. Communion is not a private matter which ends individually. It ends with a dismissal of the whole community to exercise its service together.

The meal we eat tonight will give us communion with God, but it will also give us communion with one another--in faith, in suffering, and in charity. It's a toast which praises God and which gives us--in all meanings of the word--communion.