

August 2024

Reflection

The Bread of Angels

Angel food cake supposedly got its name from its texture. It's so light that angels having devoured it could still fly. Imagine that: angels long to eat the food of humans!

Psalm 78 marvels instead that human beings, "ate the bread of angels." It refers to the manna that the Israelites ate in the desert, which the refrain of today's responsorial psalm also calls "bread from heaven." God sent food from above so that the lowly could eat on their journey to new life.

Members of the crowd gathering around Jesus recalled this incident from the book of Exodus, marveled at the wondrous food their ancestors enjoyed, and presumptuously asked Jesus, "What can you do?" You can almost hear Jesus sigh in exasperation when he says, "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven." That bread gives life to the world.

During the Eucharistic Revival in the United States, the faithful reflect anew on what a popular hymn calls, *Panis angelicus*, "the bread of angels." César Franck composed the setting that most people know. The words are the last stanzas of *Sacris solemniis*, the traditional hymn still part of the Office of Readings for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. It recalls that ever since the Last Supper, priests offer the sacrifice so that even the lowly may eat the bread of angels.

As we prepare for the Eucharist this Sunday, let us marvel anew at the bread from heaven. Its texture conceals the fullness of life. Eating it, we fly.

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