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Abundant Life

The Good Shepherd prepares a Table for Us

Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio



The atheist philosopher of the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche, once said: "if Christians want me to believe in their redeemer, they need to look more redeemed."

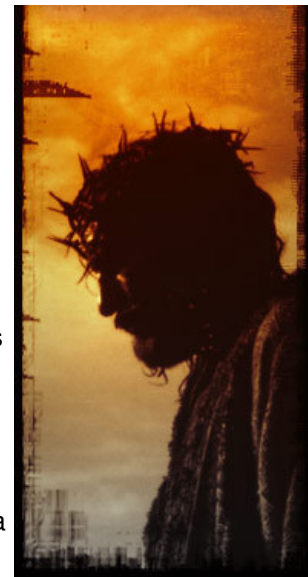
He was drawing the wrong conclusion from a perceptive observation. To Nietzsche most Christians looked just as burdened, clueless and lost as everybody else. When he looked into their eyes, he did not see hope, excitement, joy, and a sense of purpose. They seemed to be still wandering around the Sinai desert, emaciated and anemic; their faces full more of impossibilities than possibilities.

When the early Church of Rome celebrated the Easter vigil and the newly baptized came forward to receive their first holy communion, there was another cup on the altar besides the one containing the Lord's precious blood. It was filled with milk and honey. For having passed through the waters of baptism, they had crossed the Jordan and entered into the Promised Land. Never mind that they could not worship openly for fear of being dragged off to be thrown to the lions. After years in the desert, they were bound and determined to enjoy the fruits of the Land every chance they could. The nourishment did them good. Evidently they looked redeemed, because, despite the danger of persecution, so many of their neighbors came to believe in their redeemer that finally even the Emperor confessed faith in Christ.

Jesus did not pour out the last drop of his blood so that we could drag ourselves through life with the hopes that, after a lengthy stay in purgatory, we could squeeze through the pearly gates by the skin of our teeth. Rather he says: "I came that they might have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). He said this while speaking of us as if we were sheep and he our shepherd.

In my last visit to the Holy Land, I learned something about sheep and why the patriarchs of Israel herded them through the wilderness. Unlike cows and horses, sheep can survive on just about anything, even scraggly clumps of weeds, scorched brown by the Middle Eastern sun.

But Jesus is a *good* shepherd. He is not content to see us barely *survive*. He wants us to *thrive*. He takes pleasure in plump, robust sheep, not scrawny, anemic ones. So the pastures to which he leads us are verdant, lush, and green (Ps. 23), not scorched and brown. He spreads out a table, a true feast before us, not lunch in a brown bag. He does not ration our nourishment. Instead, our cup overflows.



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Imagine his surprise when most of his sheep walk right by the oasis with its succulent grass and instead insist on munching the dried weeds at the edge of the desert.



But that's what most Catholics appear to do. Have you ever noticed that more people show up to acknowledge their sins on Ash Wednesday than come to celebrate the gift of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday? Has it ever appeared odd to you that of the many who faithfully give up chocolate and other things during Lent, very few enjoy daily Mass, adoration or extra time reading Scripture during Eastertide?

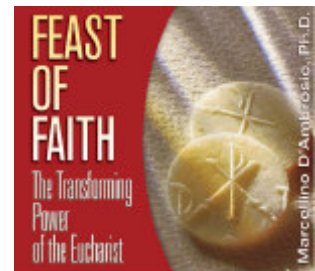
You can lead sheep to pasture but you can't make them drink. The verdant pasture of the Catholic heritage is full of delectable treats that will make our spirits strong and our hearts sing. The whole new world of the Bible, the healing balm of the sacrament of penance, the writings of the Fathers, Doctors, and spiritual masters, the teaching of the Councils and the Popes, and most especially the Feast of Faith which is the Eucharist, these provide an abundance of savory nourishment that most of us have scarcely sampled.

The greatest insult to the host of an Italian home is to visit and not eat. It cost the Lord his very life to prepare this table for us. Out of courtesy to Him, for the sake of your health, and for the sake of the Nietzsche's of the world that need to see before they believe, **eat!**

This article originally appeared in [Our Sunday Visitor](#) as a reflection on Acts 2: 14, 36-41; Ps 23; 1 Pet 2: 20-25; Jn 10:1-10, the Mass readings for the Fourth Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday), year A. It is reproduced here by permission of the author.

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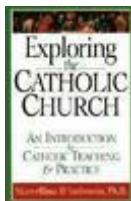
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