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The Eucharist vs. Junk Food
You Are What You Eat
By: Marcellino D'Ambrosio



Twenty years ago, George Gallup conducted a poll called "Religion in America." He studied two groups of Americans, regular churchgoers from various Christian churches on the one hand, and totally unchurched people on the other. He quizzed both groups on issues ranging from the divinity of Jesus, to cheating on income tax, infidelity in marriage, and abortion.

His findings were shocking. Fully 88% of the churchgoers had answers identical to those of the unchurched people. He dubbed these folks nominal Christians. Only 12% of the churchgoers had opinions and lifestyles that were recognizably Christian.

Hold it. Ephesian 4:17-24 tells us that to be a Christian means to live in a radically different way than the pattern offered by the pagan society that surrounds us. Being a Christian means acquiring a new mind and becoming a new person who reflects the image and likeness of a holy God.

So why don't 88% of churchgoers get it? They have presumably heard this passage in Church more than once. Maybe it is because the adage is true—you are what you eat.

Recently I heard someone quip that if you are what you eat, most Americans are fast, easy, and cheap. But scarier than what we put into our mouths is what we put into our minds. The average American watches over 20 hours of TV per week. When not watching the tube, we are often online, listening to radio, scanning a magazine, or listening to our favorite CD. Should we be surprised that our values generally reflect the values of the



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entertainment industry and news media? After all, you are what you eat.

That's why Jesus offers himself to us as the bread of life, the bread that comes down from heaven. Since the 16th century, people have often debated the meaning of John 6. Should we interpret the manna from heaven to be his Word, or rather the Eucharist? This is a false alternative, as shown to us by the Mass. An ancient tradition dating back to the early Church Fathers says that we feed on Christ from two tables, the table of the word, symbolized by the lectern, and the table of the Eucharist, which is the altar.



Each Mass offers a feast of God's word not only in the readings, but in the prayers and acclamations which are usually direct quotes or paraphrases from Scripture. The word of God in the liturgy is like a double-edged sword that penetrates deep, challenging us, healing our wounds, enlightening our minds, directing our steps. It stimulates the eyes of faith to recognize the body and blood of Christ under the humble signs of bread and wine. The Eucharist is indeed the most substantial food he offers us. We are called to be the Body of Christ. Why did he give us his body, blood, soul and divinity under the forms of bread and wine? Because you are what you eat.

Lots of Catholics who regularly come to Mass are part of the 88% nominal majority. Why is that? Because the word and Eucharist can only be eaten by faith and digested by those who are not bloated with junk food. Many scarcely hear the Sunday readings because their minds are filled with the song they were listening to on the way to Church or the to-do list from their Day timer. Many hear but quickly forget since they don't feed on God's word again until the next time they are at Sunday Mass.

If we carefully examined the 12% of churchgoers with recognizably Christian lifestyles, I bet we'd find that most of them shy away from intellectual junk food, coming to Mass hungry (maybe that's the point of the hour pre-communion fast). I bet they provide some time to digest the Word and the Eucharist through regular moments of quiet prayer throughout the week. And I bet they are smart enough to know that you don't eat just once a week and expect to run the race to win (1 Cor 9:24). Like the Israelites in the desert, these Christians gather the manna of God's Word every day and make it their daily bread. Some even attend the Eucharist daily.

Besides their lives being more inspiring, the lives of the 12% in Gallup's poll exhibited one further characteristic. They were considerably happier than both the unchurched



and the nominal Christians who were equally plagued with a vague sense of emptiness.

Junk food may taste good, but it often leaves you with indigestion. But the bread of life satisfies. We were made for it. As Jesus says, “no one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, no one who believes in me shall thirst again.”



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