

CORRESPONDENCES

There is always a surprise in store when one's heart is open to the possibility. This was the case at the Lutheran-Episcopalian-Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference on Shared Ministry which was in Montgomery recently (and for which I serve on the planning committee). The keynote speaker was a Methodist bishop of north Alabama; the topic was Eucharist and their denomination's recently issued document "This Holy Mystery."

One of the differences in practice between Catholics and Methodists is the importance of making daily celebrations of Eucharist a reality in the Catholic Church, as opposed to typically once a month (or even once a quarter) in most Methodist congregations. When challenging one of his Methodist pastors to celebrate Holy Communion on a specific Sunday he would be visiting the parish, he was disappointed to learn the pastor had refused. The reason? "It's not our monthly Communion Sunday, and we didn't want the congregation to be confused." The Methodist bishop pressed the point, and he was told, "But if we celebrated Communion that often, it would cease to be 'special.'"

The Methodist bishop recounted this event in a meeting with a Catholic professor, who told him, "But Eucharist is not a 'special event'—it is the *ordinary food* of Christians who deserve and need to have it regularly. Human beings don't eat meals only on 'special occasions.'"

I could almost hear this professor speak the words. His name was Aidan Kavanaugh, a Benedictine monk of St. Meinrad Arch-Abbey in Indiana, and then a professor of liturgical studies at Yale. He died this past year. But long before that, he was a professor and mentor of mine at Notre Dame, where he chaired the Theology Department and the Doctoral Program of Liturgical Studies.

This is not just an exercise in nostalgia, however. I want to consider Aidan's comment: "Eucharist is not 'special' but regular, ordinary food for believers." This does not mean 'ordinary' in the sense of 'not particularly good quality,' like we'd refer, perhaps to a 'Happy Meal' or a frozen pizza. It does mean 'ordinary' in the sense that needs to be our typical nourishment, like mother's milk is for a baby, or a solid breakfast should be for school-age children. It is 'ordinary' in the sense that if we do without it, we do so to the risk of our spiritual health. Imagine a college linebacker trying to perform on game days without ever showing up at the training table...

We need, as believers and disciples, to be nourished regularly at the two tables of our God: that of Word and that of Sacrament. Without this strengthening, we risk being weakened (and ultimately falling) disciples—perhaps even choosing to remain in the dust of our fall rather than putting forth the effort to get back up. Hear our Lord's call: "All you who are thirsty, come to the water! Come, without paying, drink wine and milk...Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare" (Is. 55:1-2). He is ready to serve us; are we ready to be regulars at the Table?