

What do they eat?

By Bishop Paul V. Marshall

July 2007

[This is Bishop Paul Marshall's July column for secular newspapers, usually different from his column in Diocesan Life. The column is sent to newspapers throughout our 14 counties. It is published by [The Morning Call](#), Allentown, on the first Saturday of every month. This month's column has already appeared also in [The Pocono Record](#), Stroudsburg. It will likely appear in five or six additional papers over the next few weeks. The combined circulation of papers that publish the column regularly is about 400,000. Some 120 columns have been published over the past eleven years.]

When Diana and I made 13 presentations around our 14-county Diocese of Bethlehem about our visit to our partnership Diocese of Kajo Keji, a frequent question about our Sudanese sisters and brothers was: "What do they eat?"

After I quipped that there was no McDonald's in Kajo Keji, we stressed that they ate radically different and the same food, with sincere and joyful hospitality.

Let me explain.

If you are not at my son's favorite restaurant by six on the night of the Brooklyn bakery run, the *cannoli* are gone. To people from the old neighborhood, there's only one kind of *cannoli*. Each *cannolo* is treated as precious.

Thirty years after my grandmother's death, the only authentic *kruschiki* are those my sister makes once a year from grandma's recipe.

On the other side, only my mother (and now Diana) makes a certain kind of German apple cake.

When I shared my quest for perfect Kaiser rolls and rye bread on our diocesan Internet list, email came from many who don't live where they were born.

There's more than one way to feel away from home. We yearn for God, sensing the distance. We sense our distance from those who have gone before us and from the Lord we wish to see more clearly. We grieve emotional distance from others. We feel at times like "a motherless child, a long way from home."

When we wayfaring pilgrims feel disconnected, lonely, yearning, or just generally "a long way from home," the Body and Blood of Christ are a precious taste of food from home.

Eating *kruschiki* reconnects me instantly with a large part of my experience, including a tough little woman's journey from Bremerhaven to a new life in a new country.

Eucharist reconnects me instantly with the meaning of my life, with the carpenter whose journey through death to new life gives me life, with those in the room and with all who have been to Christ's table at all times and in all places.

Almost the first thing out of my grandmother's mouth, when I visited, was the affectionate command: "Eat." I didn't know then that sharing food is how people establish, renew and solidify relationships. Eating together is not a casual thing.

Think of Jesus' wisdom in commanding his disciples to have at the center of their practices a simple meal. In Luke's gospel account, the Last Supper takes place in the middle of a fight between the disciples!

I can easily recall that the Body and Blood of my Lord are really present at the altar. Sometimes I need God's help to remember that this really is a meal. God has put us at table together so the daily disagreements, the impatience, the frustrations, and the challenges of living together may be transcended.

In medicine, science, and religion all great new truths begin as blasphemies of a sort. Imagine the look on the disciples' faces when Jesus took that cup and said this is my blood, for you.

To those who thought he had gone too far, he encouraged openness to the menu: *Go ahead. Take it. Eat it. Drink it.*

To us who would like to remain a bit disconnected from or incurious about each other, Eucharist is an adventure. Surprise looms. We don't know whom we will be next to, with whom Christ is reconnecting us.

We experience the Body of Christ in the sacrament within that ever-elastic and exciting context of the Body of Christ which is the church. Motherless children, people far from home, folks feeling like outsiders, people who need to escape being insiders: *Eat.*

[The Rt. Rev. Paul V. Marshall is bishop of the Diocese of Bethlehem, 14 counties of eastern and northeastern Pennsylvania. Additional columns and sermons by Bishop Marshall are available at www.diobeth.org.]