Sunday, October 7, 1973
A SACRED MEAL
John 21:1-4,9-14

What is the meal that you most remember? Is there one which stands out? Think for a moment! Was it the first time that a son or daughter returned home after you had not seen him or her for a while? Or was it a particular wedding supper or birthday dinner, or banquet honoring someone, or a memorable Christmas dinner? Or perhaps it was a meal following a funeral service for a loved one. What makes some meals special or sacred and therefore different from ordinary ones?

Most of us eat two or three meals a day, some of them hurried or on the run, some of them snacks, sometimes we eat alone, sometimes while having meetings and in varied surroundings. But there are those special times when we sit at table with old friends or family and take our time, enjoy the companionship and conversation, and then the meal can become something extra, it takes on a sacred quality.

There are also those special family festival meals — birthday dinners, Thanksgiving dinner and Christmas dinner. These often take on a sacred or holy nature.

Sometimes we go to a lot of trouble to plan and prepare a dinner party for a special occasion or guest. We want things to go just right. We want the event to be something extraordinary. And it is!

So, there are many meals that take on a sacred characteristic. In fact, most of our celebrations include eating together, whether it be a snack, an informal buffet, or a sit-down dinner.

We've also experienced spontaneous and unplanned sacred meals. Some old friend or relative drops in unexpectedly and at the last minute we put on the special tablecloth, get out the best silverware and China and the meal turns into a celebration that is sacred to us.

There are also those spontaneous times when a meal shared turns into something sacred even though we have used paper plates and paper cups and the food is leftovers. The meal takes on a sacred quality because of who is present.

Zacchaeus experienced the sacredness of Jesus Christ, when Jesus invited himself to be the guest at Zacchaeus home unexpectedly. I'm sure that Zacchaeus never forgot that meal. It changed his life.

Jesus and his disciples must've eaten many meals together. And in the Bible, there are some meals that were remembered enough to be written down. There was the last supper together before Jesus' trial and crucifixion. This meal was remembered because of the way in which Jesus took the bread and wine and used them as symbols of his body and blood and as even wider symbols of God's sacrificial love for us, and all the world. In early years, the meal was also remembered because it was the last meal with Jesus of that close company of disciples before the crucifixion. Only as time passed did the disciples become aware of the full significance of that last supper together. Jesus and his disciples must've eaten.

Another meal remembered by the early church and recorded in the Bible took place on Easter Sunday evening. Jesus had been walking with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus and

they hadn't recognized him. But as they arrived at their destination and invited him to have supper with them, the Bible says he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. In other words, an ordinary supper with a last-minute invited guest became a sacred meal.

A few days later, several of the disciples had gone fishing. They had returned to their old occupation following the crucifixion and resurrection. They had seen Jesus alive several times but were not sure what it all meant. Now after fishing all night and as they were coming near the shore in the morning, they saw a man on the beach and at first did not recognize him. When they got onto the land, they saw a fire prepared and fish and bread. Then Jesus gave the invitation. "Come and eat breakfast." Now they knew it was the Lord. And Jesus took bread and fish and gave it to them. An unexpected breakfast turned into a sacred meal — a communion breakfast. No wonder the meal was remembered and written down in the Bible.

The sacred meal, holy communion, often takes place in unexpected ways. In a sense of course, all meals are sacred. They are so because the food we eat provides the energy for our bodies and minds. It is part of the source of our life. It is also what makes all human beings equal. We must eat if we are to stay alive.

No doubt this is one of the reasons why sharing and serving food is a part of almost all of our celebrations. In sharing food and eating together, we are sharing life it-self in a real way as well as in a symbolic way. That's why throughout all cultures to invite someone to have a meal with you, to share your food, is to share life itself. It's no wonder meals can take on a sacred quality.

At the same time, it's important that we have some especially planned sacred meals. This is what Holy Communion is, among other things. It is sacred because of what it helps us to recall about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The bread and wine are common material substances. Yet they are charged with emotional power because of what Christ means to us. The late G. H. Studdert-Kennedy made it very clear when he said: "I might pluck a rosebud off a bush, it would be a rosebud and nothing more. The one I love best in all the world might pluck a rosebud off a bush and give it to me, and it would be a rosebud and a great deal more. The substance would be changed because she gave it to me."

So also, Holy Communion becomes sacred in a special way because it is Jesus Christ who is feeding us and who is pre- sent with us.

It is also sacred because this holy meal unites us with all human beings around the world. Today especially on Worldwide Communion Sunday, we gather with Christians everywhere at the Lord's Table. We are reminded that in Christ there is no east or west, in Him no south or north. That too, is sacred! Amen.