

Parents of the first communicants: 6 or 7 years ago or so, you presented your child for Baptism. In the course of that rite, the church asks you to state your reasons for taking that step: "What do you ask of God's church for your child?" You probably answered with a single word: FAITH, LIFE, or simply, BAPTISM. It was not a glib answer; it contained in the space of a syllable or two all your hopes and dreams and fears for the tiny stranger you held in your arms.

Now don't get nervous – I'm not going to ask you what you are seeking on your child's First Communion Day. The helpless infant who could express the most urgent needs only with a cry has grown into a small person with definite ideas and a great deal of skill in articulating them – as well you know! Now it is your youngster's turn to make a one-word response – to speak an AMEN, an assent in faith, to a statement overlaid with many layers and centuries of meaning: "The Body of Christ," "The Blood of Christ."

But parental expectations, the loving web of hopes and dreams and fears you began to weave around your child long before birth, do not dissolve when he or she reaches the age of 7 – or 17 or 27. As your child receives Eucharist for the first time, you are surrounding this day with your own dreams. And that is as it should be, for your parenthood reflects the parenthood of the God we call FATHER. Eucharist, believers insist, is a tender expression of the Father's dream for all human children. GOD'S dream is that here, around this table, that we will all find a place, that we will all find a home, that we will all learn how to forgive and accept forgiveness, that we will all learn that we are children of the one Father, God, and brothers and sisters in His Son, Jesus Christ.

There is much that makes up your dreams: Memories of your own First Communion with all its promise and excitement (and, perhaps, disappointments), your experience of the Lord's table over the years since that day, your hopes for your child's future relationship to the Lord, your faith and your doubts. These are holy dreams – and by all means, share them with your children. Also, I ask you children to be certain to ask your parents, and if you have grandparents here, and aunts and uncles -- ask them too about THEIR first communion day. Where did it take place? What do they remember most about THEIR day? How did they celebrate? What did they wear? Some of your grandparents may have received communion when the Mass was still in Latin. I still remember very distinctly my first communion day – after a beautiful Mass we had a breakfast in the parish hall, and in front of each of our plates was a small angel, which I still have, now 57 years later. MY dream on that day was that someday I would be a priest and actually celebrate Mass, and my dream came true. Your dreams can come true as well around this table. Just keep talking to God about them, Sunday after Sunday when you come to Mass. First communicants – I want you to ask God today to help you know YOUR dream – and He will help you to know it as you grow and mature in life.

There are still other dreams surrounding these young people – dreams spun by teachers and classmates, grandparents and extended family, and your parish community. For the table of the Eucharist is the focus of all Catholic believers' dreams. It is, for us, intimately connected with the deepest aspirations of the human heart. This table of the Eucharist speaks to believe hearts many aspects of our hunger for God: meal, sacrifice, initiation, unity, holiness. And all of these dreams we pass on to you as you receive Eucharist for the very first time.

I have 3 short parables to conclude.

1. I took a child's hand in mine. We were to talk together for awhile. I was to lead him to the Father. It was a great task that overwhelmed me, so awesome was the responsibility. And so I talked to

the child only of the Father. I painted the sternness of the Father, were the child to displease Him. I spoke of the child's goodness as something that would appease the Father. We walked under the tall trees. I said the Father had the power to send them crashing down, struck by His thunderbolts. We walked in the sunshine. I told him of the greatness of the Father who made the burning, blazing sun. And one twilight we met the Father. The child hid behind me. He was afraid. He did not look up at the face so loving; he remembered my picture. I wondered – I had been so conscientious, so serious.

2. I took a child's hand in mine. I was to lead him to the Father. I felt burdened with the multiplicity of the things I had to teach him. We did not ramble, we hastened from spot to spot. At one moment we compared the leaves of the different trees. In the next we were examining a bird's nest. While the child was questioning me about it, I hurried him away to catch a butterfly. Did he happen to fall asleep I awakened him lest he should miss something. We spoke of the Father, oh yes, often and rapidly. I poured into his ears all the stories he ought to know, often and rapidly. But we were interrupted often by the wind blowing, of which he must speak, by the coming out of the stars, which he must needs study, by the gurgling brook, which he must trace to its source. And then in the twilight we met the Father. The child merely glanced at Him and then his gaze wandered in a dozen different directions. The Father stretched out His hand. The child was not interested enough to take it. Feverish spots burned on his cheeks. He dropped exhausted to the ground and fell asleep. I was between the child and the Father. I wondered – I had taught him so many, many things.
3. I took a little child's hand to lead him to the Father. My heart was filled with gratitude for the glad privilege. We walked slowly. I suited my steps to the short steps of the child. We spoke of the things the child noticed. Sometimes it was one of the Father's birds. We watched it build its nest. We saw the eggs that were laid. We wondered later at the care it gave its young. Sometimes we picked up the Father's flowers and stroked their soft petals and smelled them and loved the bright colors. Often we told stories of the Father. I told them to the child and the child told them to me. We told them, the child and I, over and over again. Sometimes we stopped to rest, leaning against one of the Father's trees and letting his breezes cool our brows, and never speaking – and then, in the twilight, we met the Father. The child's eyes – how they shone! He put his hand into the Father's hand. I was for the moment forgotten – and I was content.

Today, parents, children, and all of us – we place ourselves once again into the very heart of God at the Eucharistic table. It is, as always, a day of great dreams! At the center of all these dreams stands these children, small persons who are developing certain expectations of their own. My prayer for you all is that our dreams may be in keeping with GOD'S dreams – and that they may all come true in Him. Amen. (adapted from Carol Luebering, YOUR CHILD'S FIRST COMMUNION, p. 1-2)