

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 2nd 2013

Believe it or not, in the text of the Spiritual Exercises, by St. Ignatius, there is a section of “Rules for Eating”. The main thrust of his thinking is that when we are seated at the table for meals, Jesus is seated with us. This image would increase reverence for the food and others at the table with us.

We are preparing to celebrate the wonderful mystery of Jesus’ presence at the Eucharistic Table with us in his Body and Blood. We could prepare for this feast by our calling to mind each time we gather for meals, whether at home or in a restaurant, that grace is not a pre-meal ritual, but an experience of relationships. We give thanks for the food we are about to receive, but even more, the conversations, the grace offered us in the holy exchanges of love and reverence experienced between and among family and friends.

As we eat our way toward this solemn celebration of Christ’s presence, we could imagine his real presence among ourselves and receive more reverently what we are eating of food and taking in as nourishment, what we are sharing by word and gestures. God is always setting us a table to receive life, hope and love.

REFLECTION

We hear in today’s First Reading part of a victory-celebration liturgy. For the previous thirteen years there has been a war between kings. Abram, in the fourteenth year assisted in retaking property and people from the enemies. He returns to the king of Jerusalem, (Salem). Melchizedek is both king and priest. He is grateful to God for this triumph. In a gesture of recognition to God for divine help, does a gesture of praise with words of blessings. Then Abram offers the king a gesture of reverence, a tenth of his goods.

What we do not hear is at the end of the chapter. Abram is offered all the recovered possessions won in his victory while the king would take the recovered persons. Abram raises his hand and states that nothing will be his; he is not to be enriched by the victory brought about by God. Gestures and words are how humans celebrate. Melchizedek and Abram do something and say something. Melchizedek takes bread and wine, which are signs of God’s abundant kindness and while offering them he says a blessing by which he asks God to allow Abram to experience God’s love and care in his life. Abram makes a gesture of thanksgiving by offering the king a present of his own goods. Then Abram raises his hand in a gesture of praise to God Who has given the victory and his words declare his refusal to profit personally from the victory.

The Gospel has several important features. The scene for the miraculous feeding of thousands takes place in a desert as did the miraculous feeding of the Israelites with manna. The inability of the apostles to find enough food relates directly to the missioning of the same twelve which opens this chapter of Luke's account. They are learning to depend on the abundant care which God has for them. Jesus has the power and love to provide. There are twelve baskets of leftovers which do represent the new Israel founded on the preaching and good deeds of these same twelve.

It is important to notice that the preaching and healing of Jesus is tied closely to the feeding. It is quite beautiful that Jesus gives the duty of distribution to his friends whom he also gives the mission of distributing the teaching and healing work Jesus had begun. The apostles are being prepared to be the leaders who serve as Jesus claims he is by his being not the one who sits at table, but the One Who serves. Lk. 22, 24

There were six of us children growing up and each night we would sit down for a dinner my dear mother had prepared. There was one thing we could not say upon arriving at our chair. Eventually one would slip and mistakenly say the magic words and be quietly, but definitely, dismissed from dinner and advised to take up occupancy for the rest of the evening in our respective bedroom. This banishment allowed a larger portion for each of the wiser. To this day and I speak honestly here, when asked if I would like some of this or that, I cannot say those words of selection. I fear writing them. Here goes, "I don't want..."

My mother was the preparer, my father the distributor; we were the served, the fed, the receivers and the nourished. What we celebrate each time we gather for the Sacred Meal of Jesus' preparation and distribution, we mind our manners, relinquish our selectivity and we say the proper words which I learned early at our family table, "Thank you" which is our liturgical "Amen!" There are those who say interiorly, "I don't want" about the Real Presence in the Eucharist of the Catholic Church. They are saying they do not want the mystery, the incomprehensible, the mind-stumping reality which Jesus handed over. God, like my own mother, prepared this meal for us by his whole life, given once and for all. It is easier to accept and receive symbols; they are understandable. To receive and "want" the tangible and consumable reality of his Body and Blood is sometimes more than we can handle, yet are invited to more than handle, but hand on in our daily lives.

His Sacred Body and Blood are the "Real Presence" of his continual desire to serve us, nourish us so that we might be and live what he claims us to be and which we receive at each Sacred Meal. We are the served by our being "cum Panis" or "bread-withers". As receivers we are moved to gratitude and then move to be his Body by being sent to serve all who are in various deserts or deserted by life's

false attractions.

We are not banished to our rooms, but sent to “love and serve the Lord” as he dwells in his sisters and brothers. What I “don’t want” is to be confined to my room of shame, because I forgot to say “Thank You” for who God has given me to be. At the Sacred Table Jesus gives himself to us so that through us, he may give himself to others. This is what he “does want.”

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live in me and I in him, says the Lord. Jn. 6, 57

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