

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Aug 16th 2015

One of my favorite movies is *The Shawshank Redemption* from 1994, starring Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman. It is a story set in a U.S. state penitentiary during the mid-20th century. The main subject of the film is Andy Dufresne, played by Robbins. Andy is serving life sentences for a crime he did not commit. After years of fighting to hold onto the hope of his freedom and on the eve of his great escape, he tells his dear friend Red (played by Freeman), “I guess it comes down to a simple choice really: Get busy living or get busy dying.”

Our God wants us to live!

Today’s readings are all about feasting on life.

In the first reading from Proverbs, we find Wisdom being the consummate hostess. She has set a table of abundance and calls out to any who will listen, “Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed! Forsake foolishness that you may live.” What an invitation! It continues to remind me of the radical hospitality I experienced during my two years of post-graduate volunteer work on the Pacific island of Weno in Micronesia. While walking on dusty roads under the shade of coconut and breadfruit trees, voices would cry out from within the simple cinder block homes, “Eto sa mongo!” (“Come, let’s eat!”). From a place of what appeared to be scarcity came such abundance. Our God wants us to live!

The Psalm suggests that it is through the act of tasting that we see. Reminiscent of our earliest days of life when we discovered our world by putting it into our drooling mouths, the Psalm invites us to see God’s goodness through the very act of savoring it often.

Each Sunday starting with the feeding of 5,000, three Sundays ago, up to today’s gospel passage, the readings from the sixth chapter of John have been calling out to us relentlessly like those Chuukese voices I heard, “Come, let’s eat!” In the midst of the monotonous murmuring and quotidian quarreling from those gathered to listen to him, Jesus puts his key message, like a favorite track of music, on repeat.

“I am the living bread...my flesh for the life of the world...”

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...”

“...my flesh is true food...my blood is true drink...”

“...the one who feeds on me will have life because of me...”

“Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

As the words leave Jesus’ mouth I hear the words leaving Andy Dufresne’s mouth, “Get busy living or get busy dying.”

How many times in my day do I starve myself of the love God has for me? How many times do I devour dark spiritual food filled with “empty calories” like jealousy, self-righteousness, laziness or indifference? How many times, like a high-chair child, do I purse my lips and refuse to accept the life God wants to spoon feed me?

And, perhaps most importantly, how many times in my day do I feel unworthy of feasting on God because of choices I have made, habits I am unable to break or dark spirits I entertain?

To each and everyone of these “dietary” decisions we make, Jesus says, “Come, let’s eat!...The one who feeds on me will have life because of me.” Jesus meets us in the ordinary moments of our life when we are teetering on the fulcrum between life and death, often so subtle that we don’t even realize it. Our invitation today is to take our seat at the banquet table with Jesus and feast on life!

Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner offers us a wonderful prayer to use in our response to Jesus’ daily invitation to get busy living:

“When I receive you I accept my everyday just as it is.

I do not need to have any lofty feelings in my heart to recount to you.

I can lay my everyday before you just as it is,

for I receive it from you yourself,

the everyday and its inward light,

the everyday and its meaning,

the everyday and the power to endure it,

the sheer familiarity of it,

which becomes the dimmedness of your eternal life.”

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