

20th Ordinary Time B-2009: Eating Well

Our parish is blessed with so many good parents. I know you parents spend a great deal of time caring for your children. You keep them as clean as possible and try your best to feed them well. You watch over their health, not just caring for them when they are sick, but preventing sickness by taking them to the doctor for their shots, the dentist for their teeth, etc. You help them with their school work. You help them learn to make their way in the world particularly in making good relationships with others. You want them to grow to be good, healthy people able to take their place in society. It is a full time job, I am sure. But I also know that sometimes you just like watching your children. I like to watch their antics too. Actually, everything that a child does is wonderful, so full of joy. I remember when I was working in a Boys Club I had to sit at the end of the hall to try to keep the kids from running and getting hurt. So I spent all day watching the children walking. No two walked the same. Actually, very few walked, period. They skipped, hopped on one foot, etc.

One of the things that I, and you I am sure, love watching children do is eat. For a child, particularly a young child, eating is a total body experience. For example, the young child doesn't just taste ice cream, he smells it, and feels it and wears it. There is something about watching a child eat that warms our hearts, particularly when you provide the food. You work hard caring for them, making the funds to provide for what they need, and then you love watching them eat.

That is, as long as they do eat. There is that child, I was one, who just refuses to eat, or eats only certain food. And that

is upsetting. I remember my parents trying everything to get me

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to finish dinner. I am sure that most of the families here have at least one child who gives them a run for their money at the table. But you don't give up. The child has got to eat and eat the proper food.

God, our Heavenly Father, watches us eat. I am sure His heart is also warmed by our taking in the food He gives us. I am also sure He is saddened when we refuse to eat, or take just a few morsels of the great meal He has prepared. For the food He offers us is the very Body and Blood of His Son, Jesus the Christ. When we eat His Body and Drink His Blood, we receive the strength we need to grow and do the work set aside for us in life, His work. When we refuse to eat, and only sometimes come to Church to receive His Food, the Lord must feel like the parents who are upset that their children are refusing to take the nourishment that they have paid for with the money earned. The Lord also paid for the Food He gives us. He paid for that food with His life. How must He feel when we refuse to eat?

As you might know, this is the fourth of five Sundays devoted to the Sixth Chapter of John, the discourse on the Bread of Life. Actually, today's reading is the climax, what the chapter is pointing at. Next week's reading brings us to the conclusion: where else could we or would we want to go? In the last three weeks we heard references to the Lord as the Bread of Life. This week's Gospel reading gets right to the heart of its Eucharistic message: Jesus says, "The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood you will not have life within

you.”

Jesus doesn't just speak about people believing in Him.

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He uses the expression, the one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood. He uses Eucharistic terms, terms the ancient Christians were familiar with from their celebrations of the Eucharist and terms that we are familiar with from our Masses: “bread,” “food,” “flesh,” “blood,” “to eat,” “to drink,” “will give,” “for your sakes.” Jesus, the true bread from heaven will replace the former bread from heaven, the manna and law, with His broken body and spilled blood. The concrete place where the believer encounters the true bread from heaven is in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the action where the believer shares the redemptive mystery of the Cross.

When we receive communion, we receive Jesus' sacrificed body and blood. When we receive communion we enter into the mystical. In fact, the earliest word to explain the action of the Eucharist was the *mysterium*, the mystery, the mystical.

There are some people who reduce this sacrament to a meal of fellowship. There are some people who equate the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church with meals of fellowship in some non Catholic churches. These actions are not the same. For us, the Eucharist *is* Jesus Christ. The Sacrament we receive is so much more than a sharing of fellowship. It is total union with Christ, whom we take within ourselves in sacramental form. Some people simplify this mystery into a reception of Blessed Bread. The bread is not just blessed. It is Jesus. The Eucharist is Jesus dying for us, sacrificing himself for us, and calling us to perform the same

sacrifice for others.

Our tri-annual reflections on the sixth chapter of John are meant for us to come to a deeper understanding and

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appreciation of the gift that we routinely receive every time we come to communion. We have, happily, grown accustomed to receiving communion under the forms of Bread and Wine. The main rationale for offering the chalice is to emphasize the reception of the Eucharist as the reception of Jesus' sacrifice for us, the sacrifice of His body and blood. His flesh is real food and His blood is real drink.

Children need to eat, and they need to eat well. We are the children of God. We need to take the food our Heavenly Father provides so we can grow. Wisdom has set the banquet and calls to us: "Come, eat my food and drink my wine." May we eat well so that we can have the strength to do the work of the Kingdom.