

ORDINARY SUNDAY XX "B"
AUGUST 15/16, 2015

"Dinner's ready!"

There is no more pleasant invitation than these two words. Sometimes it takes the form of a formal written invitation requesting "Responde Si Vous Plait", the familiar "RSVP", to the colloquial, "Dinner's on! Come and get it!" However you phrase it, Lady Wisdom, the personification of God in the first reading, calls to us, "Dinner's ready!"

While the food prepared and placed on the table is the physical means drawing host and guests together, there is something else also going on. To share a meal with another person, or a group of people, is not only a means of satisfying a need for biological nourishment, it is also the means through which those gathered enter into, or deepen, a bond of communion with each other. In the culture of the Bible, a land which knew constant threat of famine, hospitality demanded that whoever showed up at your door was to be nourished with food and drink, even if an enemy. This code of conduct was a reminder that no matter our differences as human beings, we share a common humanity, a common need for nourishment in order to live. Indeed, sharing a meal with someone with whom we have small or major differences can be the means by which the door to reconciliation opens.

Both realities are present in today's readings from the book of Wisdom and the Gospel.

Jesus' audience, identified by John as the "Jews" (the leading religious leaders of the day) interpret Jesus' words about feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood literally and object to what they see as some sort of a ritual cannibalism. Jesus, however, is speaking to more than physical realities. Jesus is inviting his listeners to a whole new way of living and believing. The "quarrel" in today's gospel is over the nature and person of Jesus, his incarnation and resurrection. Jesus' listeners could not accept that he was divine. After his

resurrection they could not grasp the meaning of his being raised from the dead. Without this understanding, without openness to the person of Jesus, they could not understand or accept “eating and drinking” of him in his teaching, and later, under the sacramental symbols of his risen presence in bread and wine in the Eucharist.

Food and drink consumed is transformed into our bodies through the natural process of digestion. We become, as the saying goes, what we eat. In the Holy Eucharist, the reverse happens. To eat and drink of Jesus, is to become Jesus! Jesus’ divine life now becomes our human flesh!

Just as physical food renews and energizes us for life’s many responsibilities, so the Holy Eucharist sends us forth as “bread and wine”, the body and blood of Jesus for others. This is what Jesus’ command, “do this in memory of me” at Mass commissions us to do.

In another place in the Gospels Jesus gives this same commission in these words: “the gift you have been given you are to share as a gift.” These words remind us that not only the gift of Jesus’ life given to us through baptism and renewed continually through the Holy Eucharist, but our physical life itself as well as our talents and materials possessions, all come as gift of God and are entrusted to us as stewards to be used in working with God in the divine plan for human life and creation. This is what a spirituality and practice of “stewardship” entails. Pope Francis in his recent encyclical on the care of the gift of creation makes the same point. Blessed by God, we now are called to be a blessing for others and the world.

This weekend as we prepare for the annual renewal of our commitment as a parish and individually to living as stewards of God’s gifts to us, I am pleased to invite Terry and Elin Herrman to briefly share some of the ways they attempt to put into practice Jesus’ Eucharistic commission: “do this in memory of me” as Christian stewards.