

19th Sunday 2015

Introduction

First, let me say again how happy I am to be here at long last. It is my goal to celebrate the main Sunday Mass in all of the nearly 150 parishes of the Archdiocese of Baltimore – and it is taking me a lot longer than I ever imagined it would. So, please pardon my tardiness and know how grateful I am to you and to your parish family, past and present, for your fidelity to the Church's mission and your spirit of loving service.

Speaking of fidelity to the Church's mission and a spirit of loving service, I'd like to join with you this morning in expressing of deepest gratitude to your pastor, Father Michael Orchik for his dedicated priestly service!

Food in Scripture

Food, as we know, is one of life's most basic necessities. All of us are hungry, at least three times a day, if not more often. We are blessed to live in a land where food is abundant even though there are many in our midst who are malnourished. Globally, there are literally millions and millions of people who are undernourished and even starving, these starving people have a real claim on our consciences. The Shrine of the Little Flower is especially generous in reaching out to those in the neighborhood who are in need, and I am grateful.

Because food is such a basic necessity, we are not surprised that Scripture mentions food so often. When the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years, the God sent them manna from the heavens. Today's 1st reading describes how God saved the prophet Elijah for starvation & thirst as he journeyed for forty days and nights toward God's holy shrine at Mount Horeb. In the Gospels, Jesus more than once miraculously fed the hungry crowds; in one account, Jesus fed 5,000 with only five loaves and two fish. As long as Jesus was providing people with earthly food, they were happy. But when he took the next step and started talking about "bread from heaven" and even proclaimed himself to be "the living bread come down from heaven," well, then, people began to complain and many walked away from him. It was one thing to be fed by Jesus; another thing to be taught by Jesus; but quite another for Jesus to claim to be that truth which alone nourished their souls.

Our Attitude Toward Food

Since food is so important in Scripture and since we eat with such regularity, this might be a good opportunity to examine our attitude toward food. Don't worry, I'm not going to give the diet and exercise talk nor am I going to recommend Nutrisystem or Slimfast! Instead, I'd like to reflect with you on two different attitudes of mind and heart with respect to food. With apologies to the famous nutritionist, Joel Fuhrman, I might put it this way: Do we live to eat or do we eat to live? (2X)

Living to Eat

What do I mean by the phrase, "*live to eat*"? Well, most all of us look forward to a good meal at the end of the day. We might have a favorite recipe or a favorite restaurant and, of course, so long as we don't overdo, there's nothing wrong with any of that. Food and drink, especially when shared with family and friends, cheers our hearts.

Living to eat, however, is another matter. It means that eating and drinking and generally satisfying our desires becomes the whole focus of our lives. Being fed, being comfortable, having our needs met is what gets us up in the morning. St. Paul clearly describes this attitude when he writes: "Their God is their stomach. Their glory is in their 'shame'. Their minds are occupied with earthly things" (Philippians 3:19).

This is a self-centered way of living: it's all about my wants, my needs. And when a lot of people live in a self-centered way, our families and our communities become pretty miserable places. People who are grasping for what they want argue and fight among themselves. It is everyone's self-interest bumping up against everyone else's self-interest. No wonder St. Paul tells us in today's reading from Ephesians to remove from our midst "all bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, & reviling" (Eph. 4:30). Living to eat, then, does not bring us, or our families, or our society, any happiness.

Eating to Live

If so, then let's focus on what it means to say that we *eat to live*. Of course, if we lack food for a long time, we will starve; we must eat in order to live, and, as we know, good nutrition is important to our health. It is certainly a good thing to enjoy

our food, to make it tasty and satisfying, but we shouldn't forget that we eat in order to sustain God's gift of life. And if we need to eat in order to live, we should recognize also that our neighbors need to eat in order to live. And our "neighbors" are not only those who live on our block but also include those in our community and in our world who are hungry. We should be generous to those who do not have enough to eat.

Yet, eating is more than taking in the nutrients & calories needed to sustain ourselves. Eating is symbol for a deeper type of nourishment that the human spirit craves. We all know what it means to be hungry for love and affection. In a world filled with competing claims and outlandish opinions, our minds are hungry for truth. We need the nourishment of truth and love in order to live good lives.

In the Gospel Jesus deepens our desire of our minds and hearts to be nourished. While we value the blessings of this world and use them to sustain our lives, Jesus teaches that we are made to lead lives of holiness on earth. St. Paul in today's reading also speaks about the compassion and understanding that should be hallmarks of our lives of virtue and discipleship. Living in this way, our minds and hearts are opened to the ultimate goal of our lives: eternal life and friendship with God the Father. The human spirit hungers for God's infinite truth and love and it is through faith in Jesus that we access the spiritual nourishment we long for. Jesus is the living Word of God the Father who came down from heaven as one of us. Jesus is the living Bread that has come down from heaven. It is Jesus who speaks to us when Scripture is proclaimed at Mass. It is Jesus who comes to us in the form of bread and wine when we receive Him in Holy Communion. As Jesus himself said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever"—we eat so that we may live and live forever.

Conclusion

Let us pray earnestly that we may avoid the devil's trap of living so that we might eat. Instead, let us eat the bread of life so that we may lead godly lives on earth and live eternally with all the saints in heaven in the Presence of the Triune God. In the midst of our earthly cares and desires, may we unite in giving thanks to Jesus, "the living bread come down from heaven."

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!