

Year B, Proper 15

August 26, 2018

✠ In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

I am somewhat embarrassed to admit it, but I love junk food. I think you know that...I love Twinkies and I love Oreos, those cream-filled, chocolate nuggets of goodness. I love that fake, neon orange cheese in a jar. But deep down inside I know that I would not survive long on a junk-food diet, and so I do try to make good food choices.

Almost as important as what we eat, is where and how we eat it. I won't go into the gory details, but I do remember many a bachelor meal eaten out of the skillet, standing over the kitchen sink. And I unfortunately recall meals far worse than that. I know now that a meal that satisfies our cravings and our hunger can still be an unsatisfying meal if the ambience is just not right. A meal eaten in the car as we dash between appointments is not terribly satisfying, nor is a meal eaten over the kitchen sink. Oh, it gets the job done, but it is probably not a memorable meal. My mentor is a priest in central Idaho, in his late-eighties now, and he eats every meal with a white table cloth and a table setting that looks like it came straight out of Better Homes and Gardens. A tuna sandwich becomes a gourmet meal in just the right setting.

And so, rightly, food plays an extremely important role in scripture and in our faith life. Starting with the legendary apple in the Garden of Eden, to the feast Abraham presented to three visiting angels, to Moses and the Passover feast of Exodus, the quails and the manna, to the feeding of the 5,000 and the Last Supper. But in this morning's Gospel reading Jesus offers us a banquet – a different kind of banquet. Now if you are

not disturbed on some level by today's Gospel reading, I envy you. Even after the number of times over the years that I have heard these words, read them, pondered them...I find them disturbing. At its most basic level what Jesus is proposing...what Jesus is requiring of us...is taboo in almost every culture in the world. What Jesus is asking us to do breaks the laws of his own people and so I imagine that the disciples had a reaction similar to mine.

...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,  
you have no life in you

The disciples were disturbed by what Jesus had to say. Over time they came to see Jesus as the one who would provide for their physical needs. Hadn't Jesus just fed 5,000 people? And weren't those barley loaves particularly delicious? Let's make Jesus our king and ruler so all our physical needs will be taken care of. Jesus was in danger of becoming just another worker of miracles to the crowds...even apparently to the disciples. Jesus needed to stun the people...he needed to shock his disciples into understanding who he was. "I can give you bread and fish and wine," Jesus told them, "but so can a lot of resourceful people." Honestly, my mother-in-law could feed an army with just a package of hot dogs and a bag of Fritos.

What Jesus has to offer is more than a meal that leaves us wanting or needing more in a few hours. Jesus offers us the food that satisfies our spiritual cravings. Jesus offers us bread that sustains us forever. Jesus tells us that he is that very bread. "I am life itself," Jesus tells his disciples. "If you desire life eternal then you must consume me so that where you are I am. I must be an integral part of you for you to receive eternal life."

Jesus must be an integral part of each of us. When we leave this church, we must take Jesus out into the world with us. He is not left behind in the pew, patiently waiting for our pious little selves to return next Sunday. No, hopefully we have consumed him, internalized his message and his hope and his love... and he has energized us and we are ready to go – out into the world.

How does this happen? How do we “consume” Jesus? It certainly happens at the communion rail. It happens on that rare occasion when the sermon is especially good, and you leave this place feeling full of the Spirit. It happens through faith, it begins at baptism. We consume Jesus when we study scripture and when we pray and when we listen for God’s call to us. We consume Jesus when the faithful are gathered together in community. Community – is the white linen table cloth and fine silver that make the banquet so special.

Some of the disciples told Jesus that his teachings were too hard...his words were too difficult to understand, and they left him. “Are you leaving, too,” he asked those who remained with him? “I don’t know where else I can go,” Peter replied, “for you have the words of eternal life.”

Jesus’ words are indeed difficult to understand and so we must simply take them on faith. Jesus, however he says it, offers us a banquet - a way of life that leads to spiritual contentment, to a satisfying, full, meaningful life, to forgiveness. Jesus offers himself to us as the meal...the banquet...that leads to eternal life.

AMEN

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam