

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Proverbs 9:1-6

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

We all need food and drink to live, and the young also need them to grow and mature. That's pretty obvious. In fact, some anthropologists believe that our early ancestors thanked the spirits of the animals they killed for sacrificing their lives so that they, the people, might live. In a later period, people worshiped gods and goddesses of the harvest and of the hunt.

The ancient Hebrews saw hospitality toward strangers as a sacred duty. Think of Abraham inviting his angelic visitors for a meal when they turned up outside of his tent. By Jesus' time there were many rules and procedures regarding food and meals. Breaking bread with someone implied a real relationship. That's why Jesus' critics were always upset when he ate with tax collectors and sinners.

Prayer at the beginning of a meal is a venerable tradition. We wish to express our gratitude to God for that which gives us life. Sharing meals is still a sacred duty. We establish or re-establish relationships—we acknowledge the humanity of our companions.

The Sunday dinners, provided by Fairport churches, give people who often eat alone, the opportunity to connect with others. When the volunteers who provide meals for our RAIHN guests, sit down to eat with them, they're saying, "we're all in this together." During my trip to Europe, I shared meals with old Cleveland friends and acquaintances, and with a couple of rapidly aging relatives. We told stories of the years since our youth, and I remembered where I came from.

The Eucharist is all of this. It is life-giving, because it is Jesus, and it unites us around a common table, for all the Christian altars in the world are, in a sense, the same table.

But how can we appreciate the Eucharist if sharing and enjoying meals is an increasing rare event? In many contemporary

households, it's almost impossible to have dinner together, even once a week. We eat on the run too much. There are fast food commercials that praise us for this. If we don't have time to cook our food and sit down at a table to eat it, it must mean we're busy doing important things.

And then there are all the difficulties we have with eating too much, not eating enough or eating the wrong stuff. We're constantly being warned about the dangers of food. For some, food has become the enemy. I've heard more talk about sinning because someone has eaten something sweet, than sinning because someone has mistreated a fellow human being. We are really messed up about food. How, then, can we appreciate the Eucharist?

Finally, there is the tragic reality that millions and millions of people are starving in a world where there still is enough to eat for everyone. What can the Eucharist say about this?

Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist to remind us that food is life and that he is the source and summit of all life. When we approach this very simple and most holy meal, Jesus shares his divine life with us, and we are in communion with him and with everyone who takes part in the Eucharist. There is a radical equality here, and we realize that it should be this way at every table.

So let us, at least once in this coming week, share a meal with other people. Let's shut off the t.v. and cell phones and really listen to our table companions. Let's share our lives as well as our food. And let us remember that Jesus, the living bread from heaven is with us still.

May every meal be a eucharist.

Amen.