

I'm Tired of Being an Apple Giver

Picture this scene:

While the kids are getting dressed for school, mom's in the kitchen making their lunches: Katie likes her sandwiches cut in quarters; Bobby prefers strawberry jam. As she packs the sandwiches, she smiles – imagining the delighted looks on their faces when they open the dessert treats she places in the bag.

Now picture this scene:

The spiritual writer, John Shea tells about giving a retreat a number of years ago, when a woman stood up quickly and stated her problem:

“I'm tired of being an apple giver!”

She had three children under the age of five. They were always on her: “Mommy, give me an apple!” “Mommy, tie my shoes!” “Mommy, put on my coat!” “Mommy, *take off* my coat!” Never ending...; she was sick of it.

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Two very common, ordinary situations in family life, but two *totally different attitudes* toward the life situations. Now I'm not saying that one is right and one is wrong; in fact, it could be the same person in both situations on different days... Most of us can probably identify with the feelings and attitudes of both mothers at one time or another.

(The story reminds me of one time when – my twin brother and I were taking the bus from Fairmount to attend St. Pat's school. At lunchtime, most of the other kids who lived nearby, walked home for lunch. My brother and I, with a few others, went down to a room in the school building to eat the lunches we brought from home. On this occasion, when I opened my bag, I found my sandwich neatly cut in halves ... but with nothing between the two slices of bread! My brother's was the same. I guess our Mom had been distracted and forgot to fill the sandwiches!)

At John Shea's retreat, the group was instantly supportive of the distressed mother. Many had been there and there was no shortage of advice: day-care, part-time employment, more husband-father involvement, etc., etc. In the midst of the suggestions, another voice was suddenly heard:

An older woman spoke-up: “Honey, you got to learn to sing!”

“Honey, you've got to learn to sing!”

Then she went on to explain that the Apple giver had to change her whole attitude, none of these escapist suggestions – in and of themselves – were going to provide lasting help. Tinkering with the outer world is not a substitute for inner change. She had to make “apple-giving” an event where she and her children met, and that’s exactly what the first mother was doing... with peanut butter and jelly, apple slices and cupcakes, the love of God embraces them *all* in their mother’s care. What the first mother was doing, in Catholic language: was a *sacramental moment*.

Sisters and brothers, in most of life situations, there is a need for adjustments on both the outer and inner worlds, but in our day and age, we tend to emphasize the outer world as the litmus test of change. And that is one reason why church, religion and spirituality are in many ways so countercultural; because what *we’re about here each Sunday*, is valuing the *interior* world, ... *interior* change is the first step towards a new and incisive action.

In Catholic language, we gather here with the conviction that we will live our lives from our center – our heart – our soul, where the Divine is present. (This is what our greeting “*Namaste*” means: that we recognize that Presence in our self and in one another.) We gather here with the conviction that we will live our lives in a Sacramental way.

A ‘Sacrament,’ Saint Augustine said, is “the visible sign of God’s invisible grace”! The gifts we give to one another: peanut butter and jelly and apple slices are Sacramental when they manifest the love and mercy of God and they are Eucharistic when they transform us and others as a community bound by that love!

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For the past three weeks, and this and next week at our Mass, we are reflecting on Chapter 6 of John’s Gospel, known as “The Bread of Life Discourses” of Jesus. In this Chapter, over and over again, Jesus tells us that He is the Bread that will give us life, the Bread from Heaven... “This is the Bread come down from heaven!”

Brothers and sisters, in our sharing of the Body of Christ each Sunday, we become the Body of Christ... making the limitless, complete love of Christ real to all!

Sisters and brothers, what I’m trying to say in this reflection is: that the difference between ‘being tired of being an apple-giver,’ and smiling while imagining the delighted looks on our children’s faces when they open their desert treats, is primarily the difference between being consumed by the hectic pressures of an outer world... versus breathing deeply, ... being connected with our soul, ...our heart, ... our inner-self, where we discover that Bread of Life, where we are at home with Living Water

that’s what Sabbath is all about,
that’s what Sunday is all about,
that’s what liturgy is all about,
that’s what our Catholic faith, at its best, is all about!

But to get there takes time that’s committed and takes a counter-cultural list of priorities... and we’ve taken that first step – or we wouldn’t be here today!

And so, let us pray:

In gratitude we come to your Table, O Jesus, on this Sabbath –
to be nourished by the bread and wine of your Eucharist.

May we become what we receive here:

the bread that makes us one body in you,
the wine of your blood giving life to your justice and compassion,
the Sacrament of your love in our midst.

Amen