

### TABLE OF PLENTY

A woman shared a story about the death of her father. He was a proud man she said, who spent all of his working days tilling the soil of a Carolina farm and all his Sabbaths praising God for life, seed and family. A final bout of cancer sent him to the hospital, never to go home again — and in the last weeks of his life the disease delivered the added indignity of a stroke that robbed him of his speech.

On his last day of life, the attending physicians issued the signal and the family gathered in his room: the daughter and her two brothers.

With strength fading, the father motioned to his son that he wanted a glass of water. The son went to the sink and returned with a glass full of water, which he held towards the father's lips. But the old man motioned the glass away and moved his finger from the glass toward his son as if to say: "You drink it."

Hesitant and uncertain, the son lifted the glass to his lips and drank from it. Then the father motioned toward the daughter, indicated that she should drink some too. The son passed the glass to his sister and she drank. Now the father pointed toward the other son... and the daughter saw what was happening:

"My God, "she gasped, "he is serving us Communion!"

There in the face of death, this father summoned Sacramental Water to administer the Feast of Life! Sisters and brothers, at that moment, the father, daughter and two sons were in deep Communion with one another and in deep Communion with God.

My guess is that, in our everyday life, we've all had these moments of deep Communion with one another — a moment when we experience a deep connectedness with one another and the presence of the Divine holding us in Communion... an intimacy that goes much deeper than what appears on the surface.

Anyone looking through the hospital window would see only some family members having a drink of water – perhaps they were thirsty – But looking deeper, we realize that this was no longer an episode of the dying man asking for a glass of water; it was a story about *Eucharist* – the foretaste of the eternal banquet – a sign of that man’s faith, hope and love: In the words of the Prophet Isaiah: *“All you who are thirsty, come to the water, come to me heedfully, listen that you may have life! I will renew with you, the everlasting covenant.”*

Today’s Gospel story of the feeding of the 5000 – one of Scripture’s most popular stories – is another powerful story about Eucharist: the Feast of Life; a foretaste of the eternal banquet.

Versions of the story occur six times the Gospels and it is very interesting that not one account says that Jesus “multiplied” the bread. Rather the narratives use the language we repeat in every Eucharistic Celebration, every mass: Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to the Disciples. The Gospel goes on to say that the Disciples shared with the crowd and all ate and were satisfied. It is up to the reader to imagine how the miracle happened on the ground level... because NBC News wasn’t there to record it!

The spiritual writer, Father John Dear imagines the miracle unfolding like a covered dish supper or parish picnic!

In St. Luke’s version of the story, Jesus tells the Disciples to instruct the crowd to break into small groups — where *the “crowd” disappears and “small communities” are formed...*, people introduce themselves.... Jesus takes the Disciples’ picnic basket, looks up to heaven, blesses the food, breaks the food and *shares the food with his small community*. The crowd *gets it...* and each small group begins to share the available picnic baskets, everyone gets enough to eat – just like at a covered dish supper – and: twelve baskets of food were left-over! The miracle is *that instead of hoarding their food for themselves* (as the Disciples first recommended) *people follow Jesus’ example and share what food they had*.

Sisters and brothers, this Gospel miracle story invites us to welcome each other into a communal circle of friends and discover our common humanity; when we do this, we discover not only our best human selves, but also Christ in our midst. If we dare to share our food — our hearts — our faith and our lives with one another in community, we experience Christ in our midst and a taste of the Reign of God, that we been reflecting about these last few weeks in parables.

The Divine Presence was experienced intimately in the family sharing a glass of water at their father's bedside, and at that 'covered-dish supper' in that deserted place with Jesus, and it is – when all is said and done – what Church is all about — what All Saints Parish is all about — what family is all about — what the world is all about: sharing our common humanity, our best selves, and Christ in our midst...

+++++

Sisters and brothers, as we know all too well, the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic has turned our world upside-down in so many ways: just look what our families are going through at this moment: How and when are our children going to go back to school safely? How are we going to go back to work if our children are going to be home two or three days a week? And, imagine what school administrators and teachers are going through ..., and the list goes on... .

In many ways the Church, ... our Parish, is going through the same thing. Faith is an encounter with Jesus and as the stories in this homily point out, we *encounter Jesus* when we *encounter others*. The heart of Church is *presence* and *community* — *receiving* the Divine Presence of Jesus *to become* Christ to others. *How* can this happen, when it is unsafe to gather as we are accustomed??? In May, seventeen of our children were ready to receive First Eucharist and eighteen of our teenagers were ready to receive Confirmation and the celebrations are on hold... and the list goes on... .

Sisters and brothers, our Scripture readings this weekend have some powerful insights to help us. First of all, St. Paul reminds us that nothing: not “trouble, calamity, persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, or violence” ... nor the Covid Pandemic, can separate us from the love of Christ; in other words: we will get through this and we will be a stronger community at the end of it all.

+++++

Pope Francis calls us, during this difficult time, to use “radical creativity” to stay connected with one another ... as Community in Communion with one another during this time; and we're working hard here at All Saints to put our creativity to the task:

- 1) Our video-taped, online weekly mass – with wonderfully creative segments for reflection – receives some hundreds of 'views' each week;

- 2) Our Parking-lot liturgies (which, by the way if you haven't yet attended, are very safe), draw some 70 cars each weekend, spread across the three masses and provide a unique and very special sense of Community and Communion – expressed, at times, by the tooting of car horns! One Eucharistic Minister shared that at one mass, when she brought Holy Communion to a car, the parishioner indicated that – even with our careful protocols – they had reason to remain uncomfortable receiving the Host and so no host was distributed ... still, later in the day, the parishioner called the Minister to express gratitude for the deep connection that they shared in the moment... an experience of Divine Presence and love – an experience of Communion!
- 3) Monday through Friday we have daily liturgy in our church building with some 10 to 15 folks sharing Community and Holy Communion in a very safe, socially-distanced and reverent way;
- 4) Our Parish Newsletter, designed to keep us all in touch with Parish activities during these days, is sent out every week by both US Post and/or email to all on our Parish contact lists. (Please let us know if you do not receive the Newsletter!)

Still, we realize that a significant number of us aren't able to connect on a regular basis. Our Pastoral Team spent two days of Retreat this past week – praying, reflecting and exploring how we can creatively connect with all in our community as we go forward; how we can facilitate, nurture, extend and deepen our Communion with one another during this difficult time.... To make this happen, we all need to be involved; we need your ideas and in the next weeks we will be coming to you for your input.

John O'Donahue, in his book: To Bless the Space between Us shares:

*“We find ourselves crossing some new thresholds we never anticipated. To acknowledge and cross a new threshold is always a challenge. Everything that was once so steady, so reliable, must now find a new way of unfolding. It demands courage and a sense of trust in whatever is emerging.”*

I must share that whenever I preach on the 'feeding of the 5000,' I always think of my mother... In the family we would joke that she could feed a crowd at lunch time, stretching a can of tuna fish – infinitely! And, there's nothing as intimate as the invitation: "Would you like to join us for lunch?" "Won't you stay for supper?"

Let us all pray this week that we'll be awake to those moments of real presence – of Eucharist – like the family at the deathbed, the crowd with Jesus, the parishioner and Eucharistic Minister... .

Amen!