

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time [B], 2024 (OSF)

I'm sure we all have our own favorite times of the day—the early morning when life is a little slower and more peaceful, or the final moments of the day when life quiets down again, or watching the evening news.... I am a morning person. Occasionally on a Saturday I may sleep in until 6:00, but most days I am up between 5:00 and 5:30.

But **eating together** has always been a special time for me. When I was growing up, our table at home usually had ten of us seated around it—dad and mom at each end and the rest of us always in the same seats between them. There were never four conversations going on at once. There we were taught to listen to one another. You were always on time and never left early. In fact **no one left** until dad decided that the meal was over. We wouldn't think about coming to the table without shoes and shirts. I think it was there at the dining room table when we were most a family.

Many years later, when I was a graduate student in Italy, I learned from the Italians that eating was an art. In those days, thankfully there were no McDonald's in Rome. (That is no longer the case!) Dinner was usually around 8:00—the last great event of the day. Wine complemented the food. No one was in a hurry. The meal may have taken two hours. Most Italians were amazed and many appalled at our American eating habits: pre-packaged, pre-measured, pre-cooked meals to pop into microwaves; eating on the run. They thought it was barbaric.

These days family meals are becoming less and less frequent, partly because we don't **have** to eat together. There are more options. Everyone can eat when he or she wants.

Of course, I grew up in the 50's and 60's (Donna Reed and the Clevers!), and you will say that life is different now, more complicated. And parents today might be thinking: "What **planet** is he from? You can tell he doesn't have three teenagers who have 16 different activities that they have to be at different times, or he doesn't have a couple of pre-schoolers who can't sit still for more than three minutes." All of that is true; but everyone moans today about what is wrong with society and what can we do to turn things around? One thing, I think, is to do everything we can to make the meal a special time of being together—not just to eat, but to be nourished by one another.

Dinner has always been a part of our **religious** family too. The most sacred event in the history of the Jewish people occurred at a meal, Passover. The Lord God Yahweh saved them and led them out of slavery to the Promised Land. It began with a family meal.

The most sacred event in our *Christian* history also began with a meal—Jesus with his closest friends, sharing food and wine together, then another journey to the Promised Land, this time up the hill of Calvary to death, but also to life forever.

Look how many times the gospels tell us about Jesus and a meal or the times when he tells a story about a meal to make a point:

- at Matthew's house
- the wedding at Cana
- Martha and Mary
- at Zaccheus' house
- the story of the Prodigal Son
- of Lazarus and Dives
- the wedding feast of the king
- the disciples on the road to Emmaus

--Today, feeding the 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish

This story is obviously a preview of the Eucharist. Jesus fed the crowds with simple bread. But more happened than just their hunger being satisfied. Those people became united as one in the food he gave them. I can imagine that years later people would ask one another, “Were you there that time...?” The same is true for us here.

People often ask “Why do I have to go to Mass? I believe in God, and I can pray to Him in the quiet of my room or taking a walk in Wildwood Metropark.” Or nowadays I can watch it livestreamed on my Ipad in my pajamas with my cup of coffee. All of that may be true. But what we do here is so much more than that. We come here to pray, to talk to God, but also to be **given** something: the food of Jesus himself, and to be strengthened by the presence and faith of one another. It’s like the difference between eating alone and eating a meal with other people. One can be awfully depressing, just another chore to be done; the other can be the high point of the day.

What Jesus gives us is not *fast* food, but *eternal* food. He wants **us**, just as hungry as the gospel crowds, to come together with him as they did, and to be filled with food that will last. Bon Appetit!