

HOMILY SUNDAY 20 - B “Eucharistic Faith and Love”

A new waitress asked a rancher what he wanted for breakfast and he replied, “Two headlights and four hubcaps.” Thinking he was joking, she asked him again and he gave the same reply, “Two headlights and four hubcaps.” She went to the kitchen and told the staff what happened. They looked out and told her that was old Joe, just making it hard for her as a new waitress – what he wanted was two eggs and four pancakes. They started making his breakfast, while she brought him an open can of beans and placed it on the table in front of him. When he asked her what that was for, she told him the beans were for him to gas up with while he waited for his spare parts!

Do you have an unwise, fast-food attitude towards your faith?

Be wise: develop a deep, Eucharistic faith and live it out in love.

The first reading today speaks of wisdom, and the lack of it as immaturity. This focus on wisdom provides a context for today’s gospel on Jesus as the Bread of Life.

As we all know, the 60’s and 70’s was an era that saw the development of the Fast-Food phenomenon. Potato chips, hamburgers ready to go, micro-wave popcorn, TV dinners, drive-through restaurants – everything became quick and easy and even tasted good. The convenience seemed to outweigh the loss of nutrients and health value. But how wise is a choice to consistently eat fast foods?

Recently, there has been a reaction, called “Slow Foods.” Articles about this new phenomenon are starting to appear in newspapers and magazines. The idea is to make healthier choices that feature choosing healthier foods, taking more time to prepare them and especially, taking more time to gather socially and have meal times together. This seems to me to be the wisest choice.

Is it possible that as a population, we lack wisdom and are suffering from a “fast foods faith phenomenon”? Consider these symptoms. People today want a variety of spiritual experiences that tide them over, but do not sustain them for any length of time. I think it is true to say that many people are seeking religious and spiritual experiences, such as visions and apparitions, to medicate the pain of their daily lives instead of dealing with their issues directly. In their prayer lives, people are talking to God and making a lot of demands, hoping God will do their will and do it promptly. Could there be some lack of wisdom here?

What then would a wiser “slow foods faith mentality” be like? Our prayer would be more contemplative, with more time spent reading, pondering and listening to God’s word, seeking only what is God’s will for us. We would have greater self-awareness in our lives and less denial. We would take time to feel our feelings and share them with others, meditate on spiritual truths, name our defects of character and our sins and deal with

them, and also acknowledge our personal qualities. We would not be afraid of the inner journey to our true selves.

We would be more at home with the process of inner change, repentance and metanoia. Along with a greater intimacy with God we would have more intimate relationships with others, perhaps a soul mate, someone who would know us through and through. We would find ourselves making a deeper commitment to a faith community of caring and worship. In the words of the second reading, we would make music to the Lord in our hearts, be filled with the Spirit, and give thanks to God the Father at all times in the name of Jesus.

The gospel suggests that, above all, a wise slow-food mentality would lead us into a deeper appreciation of the Eucharist and living it out in love.

Jesus presents us with some choices for those who are wise: to believe that he is God, the Bread of Life come down from heaven, and then to eat his Body and drink his blood.

We are first asked to believe. Jesus identifies himself as the Living Bread that gives eternal life and leads to him indwelling in us. Wisdom and faith tell us that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in three special ways: in each person who participates; in the proclamation of the Word (he is after all the Word of God made flesh), and of course in the consecrated Bread and Wine.

Next, he asks us to eat his Body and Blood. This means more than just receiving communion. The choice of words that Jesus uses when he claims that, “unless we eat his flesh and drink his blood we will not have life within us,” are significant. He does not use the Greek word “soma” which means the body beautiful, in its youthful prime. Rather, he uses the word “sarx” which refers to the body that ages, gets wrinkled, weak and sickly.

To eat this “sarx”, this flesh of his, means to love those we do not like; to accept others as they are; to love our enemies; to care for those who try our patience. It was this unpleasant reality that turned people away from him; that still today can deter those who seek an easier, softer way; who lack the wisdom to see beyond the superficial.

In short, to eat and drink the flesh and blood of Jesus, is not only to find him prayerfully in the Blessed Sacrament, but above all to meet him in one another, especially in those whom we find hard to love, whose particular personalities or needs challenge us. This is the acid test for the Christian – one the Holy Spirit alone can truly empower us to meet.

The founder of the Oblates, Saint Eugene de Mazenod, was a wise man who understood this mystery of the Eucharist. It was his profound grasp of this mystery that drove him as a bishop to reach out to the poor, the dispossessed, the marginalized, the fishermen and women at the docks of Marseille. It was this love for the poor that led him to overcome class distinction and speak Provencal, the language of the people, the “patois” of that time. It was his Spirit-filled love for all people that empowered him to found a world-wide missionary Order that would reach out to evangelize everyone. It was his faith in the

Real Presence that enabled him to be bonded with his missionaries before the Blessed Sacrament. His was truly a Eucharistic love, a Eucharistic faith. May he be an example for us in our own day.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is not just a pious worship of Jesus in the sacred bread and wine, but even more so a commitment to recognize him and serve him in our brothers and sisters in need.

So be wise - develop a deep, Eucharistic faith and live it out in love.