

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (A)

Deut 8: 2-3, 14b-16a Psalm 147 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17 John 6: 51-58

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

“...the one who feeds on me....” Jesus sounds like a pregnant woman whose child in the womb is being nourished by the mother’s own body. Or, like an infant who continues to feed on the mother during the nursing period. The child in the womb, or at its mother’s breast, could not survive without the constant feedings that the mother provides. But any parent will attest that the feedings continue throughout the child’s life. Even when the child is an adult, it still comes back to the place of nourishment it finds in its parents. “Feedings” are not only about physical food, nor are they just for certain periods of life---we need feedings throughout our life time if we are to manage this journey we are on and get to the home Jesus has prepared for us. There the feedings will be a banquet that he says will never end.

Some of us adult children are still feeding off our parents as we learn wisdom from them about aging, limitations and sickness. The learning continues right up to their passing. Children have to feed from their mothers and their fathers for all of their lives. When we have truly nourishing parents, we continue to learn lessons from them that prepare us for our own old age, a more confined life and possibly ailments or serious illnesses. With reasonably good parents, the day time and night time “feedings” last well beyond the crib stage. Malnutrition takes place when children, young or grown, have not found nourishment from a mother or father. When “feedings” were withheld; when affection, encouragement, approval, teaching, advice were not given, or poorly given, then under-nourishment results and haunts us throughout our lives. Unfortunately, these “lacks” don’t stop with us, often they are passed on to the next generation.

When parents do not provide the right kind of “feedings” for their children life is diminished. One’s spirit can shrivel up and die if good and lasting food has not been there from the beginning. The preacher can draw the parallel from the ways we have been fed by good parents throughout the stages of our lives, to the way Jesus feeds us by his very life and constant presence---- his body and blood.

In Deuteronomy Israel is reminded how God fed the fledgling people during their desert sojourn. It doesn’t sound like the trip was a garden tour. They were

“...guided through a vast and terrible desert with its saraph serpents and scorpions, its parched and waterless ground....” The way out of slavery of any kind is not easy. Freedom’s child needs help to break free, take the first tentative steps, overcome rough obstacles and there are temptation to turn back each step of the way. But God provides manna and water from “the flinty rock.” I don’t suppose the Israelites on their way to freedom felt like their desert fare was a banquet---but it was enough to sustain them. Some parts of our journey are so rough that we can barely get through the day, but we do because manna and water are provided when: a family member shows up to offer relief; a friend calls to chat and makes us laugh; a son or daughter makes the right and adult choice; a brief vacation revives a drooping spirit; a piece of music on the car radio gives us a moment’s relaxation; or a liturgical celebration touches a deep down hungry spot. When the Israelites looked back, as they did in Deuteronomy, they could see God’s feeding them a day at a time, and when they were fragile, God seemed to be nursing them at the breast.

It often is a desert journey. I have never known anyone who found deep change or freedom from the slavery of any great or small addiction easy. We undergo struggle and move mighty mountains in order to effect change in our lives. It can feel like such a struggle we are tempted to deduce that we are on our own. But when we look back at the heroic effort and observe real change, we must admit we couldn’t have done it on our own. Someone was feeding us all along the way.

A man once told me about his struggle to get and stay sober through Alcoholics Anonymous. He had tried to break away from alcohol on his own many times, but couldn’t. Then, like the Israelites in Egyptian slavery, he heard a voice deep inside calling him to “come out” and begin his journey to freedom. That began a long journey of hard work, day by day--- succeeding, slipping, and then succeeding again to stay sober. “It was hard work,” he told me, “but I never could have done it without God’s help.” Manna, day by day; water from the “flinty rock.” How else is this possible, except by God’s outstretched hand that provides the food for this day? Yet, because it can feel like our own efforts, we need to be reminded of the Source. Moses is doing this as he addresses the Israelites after their days in the desert. He also speaks to us, who may just be just starting or still struggling along freedom’s desert trek.

“Remember how for forty years now the Lord, your God, has directed all your

journeying in the desert....” This is not a question, but a statement.... as if to say, “Remember!” “Do not forget the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery....” To show that we have not forgotten the many ways God has nourished us, we celebrate Eucharist today. Attend to all the expressions of remembrance and gratitude that are expressed in our celebration. Listen and enter into the words, as we pray, “We remember,” “We recall,” We praise you and give you thanks.” Etc.

Of course, we followers of Christ have been nourished in a very special way through Christ, upon whom we have fed from the first moments of our faith journey until this very moment. When we were still infants and children, (or as adult converts), others fed us Christ. First, in small mouthfuls and then in more substantial solid food. They taught us about Christ, helped us learn our prayers and inspired us by how they lived his life as his followers. When we were sick, they nursed us to health; lonely they were there as faithful companions; groping in darkness they were the Christ-light helping us find the way. In many ways they brought us to “the bread that came down from heaven,” we ate and were able to travel still one more day through any wilderness in which we found ourselves.

Today celebrates God’s presence in our lives in many bountiful ways, most particularly in our Eucharistic celebration where the Word of God has been broken and shared and the broken bread and poured cup have reaffirmed our union with Christ. This eucharist reminds us that God has fed us a choice food and drink today. The food for our journey has been God’s own Son. Jesus is the meal that God gives us this day to help keep us going till the end of our desert journey. This is the food that puts us more firmly on the road home and when we trip and stumble over obstacles, enables us to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and start all over again.

Distributing the Eucharist has changed since I first started doing it after ordination. People used to kneel at a communion rail and, as I held up the host, reverently close their eyes. I would say, “the Body of Christ” and they would whisper, “Amen, ” and then stick out their tongue to receive the communion wafer. In the mid-seventies, the rubrics changed and I realized my thinking about what we were doing at the moment of reception of communion did too. The altar rails that separated me from them were removed. People were given the option, which almost all have taken, of receiving the eucharistic bread in their hands (and

in many places, the communion cup is also offered to all) Laity are now also eucharistic ministers.

People come forward, stand before the eucharistic minister, put out their hands as we look each other in the eyes. I still say, “the Body of Christ,” but now it has a new dimension for me and I hope for them also. As I hold the communion bread or the cup of wine, I am announcing to them that they too are the body of Christ and the blood of Christ. We are receiving what we are---and hope to more fully become. The life we are receiving helps turn our full attention from ourselves towards others. We have always said that the bread and wine are the real presence of Christ. What we hope is happening is that we are also becoming that real presence to our world.

QUOTABLE

The homily is a proclamation of the good news which invites people to thanksgiving and conversion not only at the Eucharistic table, but also in our personal and social choices of life.

---Robert Waznak in, *SUNDAY AFTER SUNDAY: PREACHING THE HOMILY AS STORY*.

JUSTICE NOTES

(These weekly quotes may be helpful in your preaching or may also be added to your weekly parish bulletin as a way of informing your faith community on some social issues.)

Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good:

A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops

Caring for the Poor and Issues of Equity

Working for the common good requires us to promote the flourishing of all human life and all of God's creation. In a special way, the common good requires solidarity with the poor who are often without the resources to face many problems, including the potential impacts of climate change. Our obligations to the one human family stretch across space and time. They tie us to the poor in our midst and across the globe, as well as to future generations. The commandment to love our neighbor invites us to consider the poor and marginalized of other nations as true brothers and sisters who share with us the one table of life intended by God

for the enjoyment of all.

All nations share the responsibility to address the problem of global climate change. But historically the industrial economies have been responsible for the highest emissions of greenhouse gases that scientists suggest are causing the warming trend. Also, significant wealth, technological sophistication, and entrepreneurial creativity give these nations a greater capacity to find useful responses to this problem. To avoid greater impact, energy resource adjustments must be made both in the policies of richer countries and in the development paths of poorer ones.

Most people will agree that while the current use of fossil fuels has fostered and continues to foster substantial economic growth, development, and benefits for many, there is a legitimate concern that as developing countries improve their economies and emit more greenhouse gases, they will need technological help to mitigate further atmospheric environmental harm. Many of the poor in these countries live in degrading and desperate situations that often lead them to adopt environmentally harmful agricultural and industrial practices. In many cases, the heavy debt burdens, lack of trade opportunities, and economic inequities in the global market add to the environmental strains of the poorer countries. Developing countries have a right to economic development that can help lift people out of dire poverty. Wealthier industrialized nations have the resources, know-how, and entrepreneurship to produce more efficient cars and cleaner industries. These countries need to share these emerging technologies with the less-developed countries and assume more of the financial responsibility that would enable poorer countries to afford them. This would help developing countries adopt energy-efficient technologies more rapidly while still sustaining healthy economic growth and development.¹⁰ Industries from the developed countries operating in developing nations should exercise a leadership role in preserving the environment.

No strategy to confront global climate change will succeed without the leadership and participation of the United States and other industrial nations. But any successful strategy must also reflect the genuine participation and concerns of those most affected and least able to bear the burdens. Developing and poorer nations must have a genuine place at the negotiating table. Genuine participation for those most affected is a moral and political necessity for advancing the common good.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: **“FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR A.”** The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and Adobe Acrobat Reader) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer. To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the “Year A–CD” button on the right and follow the instructions.
2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use “First Impressions” in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)
3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/> (Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes “First Impressions” and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)
4. “Homilias Dominicales”-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Jose David Padilla, OP, Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like “First Impressions”, “Homilias Dominicales” are a preacher’s early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive “Homilias Dominicales” drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: Jboll@opsouth.org or jboll@preacherexchange.org
5. “First Impressions” is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like “First Impressions” sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

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Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA

P.O. Box 12927, Raleigh, N.C. 27605, (919) 833-1893, Email: judeop@juno.com