

My mother will often admit that she does not like to cook – though she is an excellent cook. When I return home for visits, I have never, ever had a bad meal and most likely if I looked back as an adult into my childhood days I could say the same for then, though I did not recognize it as a child.

We see the same thing taking place in today's Gospel: As they *look back* to the Exodus event, they see they never had bad meal – which is exactly what they exclaim to Jesus, calling it *Bread from Heaven!* They make it sound like all was bliss, vacating with God in the desert.

Well Jesus being God of eternity remembers things a bit differently (remember, he was there) as compliments were far and few in-between, as the complaints would soon follow.

Growing up as children, my mother provided for all of our nutritional needs – taking great care to see that we all received a well rounded meal. And yet there were six of us and we surely complained with many of the meals being served to us: “*Chicken again? No, not lima beans, I can't eat them!*” It is understandable, then, why my mother did not like to cook, faced with such patrons as her children.

Now, then, imagine if my mother had acquiesced to our stomachs and served us what ever we wanted? Can you imagine what we would look like after eating pizza every night or the Supersized McDonalds for every meal? It would not have been a pretty picture and most likely down the road our only food source would be the hospital cafeteria.

I'll bet God is also an excellent cook, but like my mother, He may have not liked it. If we read on beyond this Exodus passage we will find that they will soon complain: “*Not manna again! What is with Quail?*” cried the Hebrews. Each time God provides a good meal, the Hebrews eventually revert to complaining. They even reminisce to their time in Egypt, saying they had a good meal each day, though forgetting how dysfunctional it was, as it was just their stomachs that were being fed so that they might make compliant slaves.

Imagine the kids come home and complain that Jones' kids get whatever they want for meals. In reality if they had lived with the Jones family they would have seen how dysfunctional it was, as the parents gave them whatever they wanted with the hope it might shut them up so they could do what they wanted. As the kids grow older, they begin to act out, hoping their parents will care enough to tell them no – to care enough to truly feed them instead of just abandoning them to anything they want as long as they do not bother them. Like the Hebrews in Egypt, their stomachs were fed, but only their stomachs.

Growing up in my family, we were not fed to shut us up and to simply feed our stomachs (Okay, maybe every now and then). No, what was most important, beyond the actual food, was the love being served in the sacrament of chicken and lima beans.

It is like the Native American Indian that brings his girl friend a beautiful conk shell, telling her that he had to walk ten miles to find it. She might reply, “*You didn't have to go all that way for me.*” And he responds, “*Long walk part of gift.*” It wasn't so much the conk shell, but the love put into finding it that really made it special.

The Hebrew Exodus story is once again repeated with Jesus Christ after feeding the 5000 – they missed the miracle of the One who gave it, for their stomachs. Instead of seeing who he was, they

wanted something more for their stomachs – they were the same children demanding junk food that would satisfy their momentary needs. They might as well have said, “*Give us another sign – a supersize McDonald’s meal and then we might believe. That is the sign we are looking for – feed us again as you did before (but make it make it a different menu, okay?)*”

If God had given in at Exodus, if Jesus had given in and if my mother had given in, it would have never been enough – that is what he is saying to them: “*Don’t look for what perishes, but for food that endures for eternal life.*” Look for this, and God will surely set His seal.

Have you ever found yourself opening the fridge and having no idea what it is you want? You just open it to see what might fill your stomach and complain there is nothing to eat, though it may be packed with food. Is this so different from what we sometimes do with church? We come in, open the door and wonder what there is to eat, though it is packed with spiritual food? The issue may be that our minds are set on our stomachs instead of our souls: “*I hope he moves this along, because I’m starving or I gotta get to the golf course*”. Or may we just open the door and complain about what is not here.

Can it be that Exodus story is repeated all over again with all of us? I mean we have the travelling crowd and we have the food. Some of us journey through life and along the way we take the Eucharist as simply bread and wine - so causally that this is all it is to us – perishable food. It becomes as monotonous as the manna God provided in desert.

Do we truly know what is being offered every Sunday? I remember I was in a crowded sacristy with another priest. In the midst of this crowd, someone came in with Eucharist, walking casually past us. The priest then replied with a bit of wit: “*Was that not the Prince of Peace, the Savior of the world that gave us eternal life so great was his love for us?*” You understand the point he was trying to make? Do we understand it is God we take within us? Do realize we are taking in God’s total, unconditional love?

We also have the Word of God to feed us each Sunday, but often these words of love spoken to us in the Scriptures are lost because our minds are set upon ourselves (stomachs?) and not what is being offered for our souls. Could I quiz some of you about what God spoke to you in the Scriptures today?

There are some here who roll in and out so fast (fast food?) you have never known who it is that surrounds you. I suspect if we only had fifty people in Mass, a good number would sit as far away as possible from the other person and in so doing, you may never know the love and life that could be offered.

+I had a parishioner tell me she decided to join the Cathedral because someone *introduced themselves* to her and from that introduction arose a friendship of true and imperishable love. That is truly the Eucharist lived out: Love given and love received and upon this God will always set His seal.

I’ll close by asking you to look beyond your stomach but that of your soul. In so doing, I think you will find that God is an excellent cook.