

Last fall while on Sabbatical in Rome (Italy) I and the other priests lived in what is called the O'Toole house, which is on the grounds of the North American College, i.e.the NAC. Staff would bring us our meals up to the house from the main kitchen. Thursday nights were always interesting because the Italian kitchen staff sought to give us "American" food. Or at least their understanding of it. It could be quite distinctive and revelatory at times; ribs that were cooked, but the sauce was in a separate dish that we had to spoon onto the meat. American style pizza that was hard to digest and often had toppings that did not make sense; beans, tuna...

Generally though food in Europe is often better than in the USA. They have strict laws that prevent additives and chemicals; they tend to eat fresher food and slow cooked food.

Whereas we can fall for the or have been seduced into the easy and quick. Unfortunately too, for dubious reasons, these processed foods are full of chemicals and additives; full of calories, but empty of true nutrition. And as studies show, we pay the price in obesity, diabetes, and other health issues that are less in the EU.

What we eat and how we eat is important. Maintaining our health is not so much about restrictions and denial, but balance and quality. I love a good peanut butter and jelly sandwich, but not every meal, not every day.

Sometimes I wonder if this quick and easy food culture we have been raised into and told is great, has also infected our faith lives as well.

We have entered into the "Bread of Life" discourse in John's Gospel. This week and throughout August each weekend we will hear more of this and it follows a pattern. It starts this week with Jesus inviting his disciples and would be followers to think deeper; to truly eat and drink of him. It will come to a shocking conclusion.

Jesus invites them, and us, to move from the quick and easy faith, in which they literally get bread and fish; to open themselves to a faith that is more profound, that is more sophisticated, that is more tasty and delicious, more satisfying.

Initially they gather around Jesus because miracles have been shown and done for them, and they want more of this. So kind of superficial. Jesus wants them to have more. It seems overwhelming at first to the disciples, so many people, too little resources. Yet Jesus makes it happen.

We cannot also settle for a quick and easy faith; there is a richness to our Catholic Christian faith that needs to be appreciated, needs to be contemplated, that needs to be savored and thought upon. That requires us to put forth the effort. It too can seem overwhelming, but this is a marathon, not a sprint; and we are so blessed with amazing resources.

There are great short videos out there, or even series of videos, like from Fr. Mike Schmitz: "Bible in a year", "Catechism in a year". Yet, these are just teasers, appetizers, hopefully whetting our desire to explore more of scripture, of our tradition, our teachings as Catholics. Because these short videos cannot get us into a deeper appreciation. They are but the beginning.

The US Bishops are concerned about Catholics, thinking maybe we don't believe in the real presence; but my experience is that people do believe, but not fully appreciate nor completely understand the gift of that belief.

The gift of forgiveness and what it means for us and how we can forgive others.

The gift of redemption and dignity; and how that can have an effect on our relationships with others.

The gift of sacrament and how that can transform our understanding of the beauty of creation.

So maybe we need to spend more time savoring and contemplating what this all means.

Maybe we as clergy need to bring out that mystery more and more in our homilies, if we have not done so already.

Maybe all of us cannot settle for the quick videos alone, but practice lectio divina, contemplative spirituality; read great spiritual writers on gratitude, forgiveness, the encyclicals of our popes; attend mass with a hunger for more.

Scripture and Jesus use banquets and metaphors of Banquets and eating to invite us to a deeper level of living. These next few weeks, as we meditate on the Gospel of John and the Bread of Life Discourse, I hope that we open our minds to a deeper way to follow Christ; in doing so find ourselves fed in our hearts, minds and souls.

Savoring what is given to us.