

We talk more about food now than ever. My family grew up on bacon fat and Crisco, and goodies like liver and kidneys. None of that is standard fare today. We are more conscious of calories and types of foods, yet even with that heart disease and diabetes are on the rise. We are what we eat. Once COVID restrictions ended many of us couldn't wait to eat out for a change, but now the eating places can't find workers and the wait often takes away from the culinary experience. Are meals rushed or leisurely? Is eating and last-minute rush or a time of fellowship and flavorful peace? IN many ways how we eat is as important as what we eat.

Many find frustration in reading of the many dietary restrictions in the Old Testament. Such laws (like many of ours) made sense in terms of nutrition, but there was a spiritual reason as well. Every meal was understood as a time of family fellowship and act of worship. But the ritual laws went further than food. Israel was to understand every action in life (whether a family meal, encounter with neighbors or business transaction) was an act of worship. The rabbis referred to such laws as "living bread." They taught living according to God's law was the right diet. Israel understood they were what they ate.

Jesus words about making himself our diet made them stop and think. As he proclaimed "*the bread I give for the life of the world is my flesh*" he announced people need more than protein and vegetables for a life that reflected God's love. He taught what we consume determines the health of our faith. To live by faith is a diet that brings Jesus into every aspect of our living, making Him the nourishment, heartbeat, and spiritual energy of every action in our lives.

The first chapters of Genesis similarly discuss diet. God said there was abundant food in the garden, but also a tree with poisonous fruit to ignore on the pain of death. The serpent's advice was, "Do what you want, God just wants to spoil your fun!" That same voice today proclaims if it feels good, do it. It is your body, your life, God's interference ruins your fun. The brokenness that started in the garden has reached into every aspect of life. Daily we make choices about a diet of faith or a diet that ignores faith. Separating oneself from the real presence of Jesus prevents faith, hope, love, and eternal peace. Separating oneself from the community of faith is like eating in the car, alone, hurried, and uninspired. Living without the body of Christ is no different than wandering in a dry and empty desert. The tree God warned about in the Genesis Garden reappeared again on a hill called Calvary. It proclaimed the result of the world's wisdom, power, and rejection of God's plan. For one afternoon and entire universe was focused on what was cooking there, and whether Satan or God would control the menu.

God's plan from that moment baby Jesus appeared in a manger was always headed to that conflict at Calvary. What better representation is there of a paradise lost than a bloody cross and a barren hill? Jesus embraced the challenge, and his Easter feast offered a new and healthy diet to forgive, renew and bring health and healing to all! Easter restores Eden's invitation to munch on healthy food. Just as manna reminded Israel life is from God, so Holy Communion becomes our foretaste of the feast to come!

In Ephesians 5, Paul wrote, *"Don't get drunk with wine, but be filled with Spirit."* He was comparing different diets, saying *"don't let world intoxicate you by its power" rather let God be healthy diet!"* It is true, we are what we eat!

Moses shared God's menu as he brought laws down from Sinai. Jesus' sermon on the mount taught about a diet that results in faith, hope, and love – that never ends. He proclaimed, *"I am living bread. Whoever is one with me will never die!"* If we are faithful to God's gifts and opportunities, we will be doing what he calls us to do. In other words, *make Jesus your daily diet, and he will keep you in a good relationship with God and each day will work out OK.*

There has never been a greater promise. "If I am in you – you are in me!" What a diet this is! As we reflect on the smorgasbord of goodies the world offers, we make choices. Will the world's offer of good works, fairness, cultural relativity, and wisdom bring health? Or will Christ's nourishment of Word and grace become the seasoning for all whom we touch? As we wrestle with difficult daily decisions we need understand God's life and nourishment first; then plug God's diet into our living and have faith God will guide us safely through this maze.

Our world still lives under the shadow of two trees. The garden tree that looks so enticing is the one God warns us to avoid – its fruit is bitter and leads only to death. The Calvary tree looks stark and empty (to worldly people) but is the one from which Jesus chose to use to provide us with new fruit of an eternal and loving harvest. From Calvary and the empty tomb, Jesus offered himself as the one fruit for all seasons, a diet for all tastes, and the only nourishment and strength for eternal life.

In a few months we will plant trees in our homes making them glitter and shine and surround them with gifts. Then we will sing "Joy to the World!" When that happens, remember what we are talking about today, and about how God took the tree that best represents the brokenness of the world and turned it into the place that produces the sweetest and most lasting fruit of all. He is like manna from heaven. *I am living bread...whoever eats of this bread will live forever...the bread I give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6:51)*

Remember; you are what you eat! -tws