

Onions

Standing in line at last weeks feast of a brunch, the first person serving the food was dear Caren Esaki.

By the time I got to her, she had already explained to 200 people, individually, and one at a time, that there were three kinds of rice at her station: white rice, brown rice and rice with seaweed and lima beans and other goodies.

"Next time," she said, "I'm going to bring a sign!"

Moving down the line, past the lovely boiled bananas covered in coconut milk, the pancit and salads and stews, was the baked chicken covered with sliced onions.

It was the onions that caught my eye.

I'm reading a book now by a favorite author of mine, Fr. Bob Capon, an Episcopal priest, who happens also to be a chef, who happens also to have written a book about cooking a leg of lamb...a book that is over 200 pages long....and he starts it off with a story about onions, because, when you're cooking a leg of lamb, the first thing you need, once you get the leg, is onions.

Fr. Capon invites his reader to begin by closely examining the onion.

Look at the bud at the bottom that used to be the root thrusting its way into the rich, garden soil.

Look at the top, which, unless you store your onions under a dark, leaky sink, is also only a bud that was once green shoots reaching for the sky.

(Now if you do keep your onions under a dark leaky sink, chances are, you've probably got green shoots coming out of them!)

But that's another sermon.

Then there's the skin.

Dry as paper, the outermost layer just falls off the onion ... until you get to that part of the skin just surrounding the fruit of the onion itself.

Peel away that skin with a careful eye and sharp small knife then, slice the onion in half.

What you will find inside is not a ball, but fingers.

Onions are formed when fingers of new onion push into the middle of the onion, spreading out the earlier fingers -- on and on until the roundness, created by all that pushing out, is done; the growing complete.

And finally, having sliced that onion in half, taking one of those fingers out of the body of the onion, placing it on the cutting board, and with the flat of the knife, squishing out the water, so that lo and behold, you find that the onion is very much little more than fingers of water, enclosed in nearly invisible skins.....

Inviting us to reflect on all that is that is also water held together by thin layers of skin: things like apples and whales and you and me.

Funny what insights an onion can bring....

So why all this attention to food and the details of food?

Because from the very beginning, from the Genesis garden filled with every form of fruit bearing tree all the way to the final grand banquet in the Book of Revelation, Holy Scripture reminds us again and again that the intersection between our world and the Kingdom of God may be found at the dining room table.

It matters not whether that dining room table is a fold out card table in a one room apartment at Mayor Wright housing or whether it is a finely crafted Koa masterpiece in that high end Kahala home – the intersection between heaven and earth, for those with eyes to see, is the meal placed upon every dining room table.

Elisha, the prophet who took up the mantel of Elijah, shows God's blessing of his ministry by feeding a hundred men with just twenty small loaves of bread.

The prophet Isaiah -- in an ecstatic vision -- cries out to all who will listen:

"Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread
And your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
And your soul will delight in the richest of fare." Is. 55:1-2.

St. Peter, in his struggling to figure out if the purity laws should come or go has a dream, a vision really, and he sees something like a giant sheet being lowered from the heavens and on the sheet are all of the forbidden foods: pig and shrimp, lobster, birds and

even reptiles and that voice, telling him, even *commanding* him:
“Eat!”

And so it is that Jesus performs his first miracle at Cana: turning water intended for washing feet into the finest wines; Jesus, who eats with sinners and tells stories of great banquets where the most unlikely, the most unseemly, are invited -- and when he is followed into the wilderness by thousands, he finds a way to set a dining room table, right there, in the middle of nowhere.

A couple of sardines and even fewer loaves than Elisha had, and lo and behold, some 5000 are not only filled, but there are leftovers - leftovers that are gathered so that nothing (meaning of course, so that NO ONE), will be lost.

If you leaned in close while the gospel today was read, you heard the Eucharist as Jesus gives thanks to God, breaks the bread, and shares it.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't ask us to make a painting of him and use it to remember him by?

Or why didn't he commission a sculpture for us to look to?

When Jesus asks us to remember him, he asks us to remember him with food - broken and shared in love.

And so, when you sit down to eat today, both at this altar rail, and at your dinner table, today is a good day to pay extra attention to what is on your plate.

Food is real, just as God is real.

Perhaps that is why God meets us in food -- opening heaven's gates to our day-to-day lives.

I will leave you as we began, with a story about onions.

This is an old story from Russia “about an old woman whose vices were so numerous that no one could name even one of her virtues. She was slothful, spiteful, envious, deceitful, greedy, foul-mouthed and proud. She lived by herself and in herself she loved no one and no thing. One day a beggar came to her door. She upbraided him, abused him, and sent him away. As he left however, she unaccountably threw an onion after him. He picked it up and ran away. In time, the woman died and was dragged down to her due reward in hell. But, just as she was about to slip over the edge of the bottomless pit, she looked up. Above her, descending from the infinite distances of heaven, was a great archangel, and in his hand was an onion. ‘Grasp this,’ he said. ‘If you hold it, it will lift you up to heaven.’” Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb*, 20-21.

Our real work is to look at the things of the world: our food, our families, and yes, even our enemies, even the stranger, and to love them for what they are. That is, after all, what God does, and we are not made in the image of God for nothing. *Id.*, 19 (paraphrase).

Bon appétit!

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