

FR. PETER'S HOMILY  
TWENTIETH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

How many of you remember growing up with the smell of freshly baked bread in the house?

My Mom didn't bake bread often, but when she did, I could almost smell it as I walked up the driveway.

Even now, whenever I experience the aroma of freshly baked bread, I am drawn back to the memory of coming home and the feeling of being loved and provided for.

I want each of us to hold on to those memories and that feeling as we reflect upon the readings today.

I want to suggest that in the Eucharist we experience the "aroma" of the sacrificial love of Jesus.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine wrote this: "You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for You. I have tasted You, now I hunger and thirst for more."

Today's psalm - which we have been praying each week since we began the Bread of Life Discourse - invites us to "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord."

We have tasted and we have seen the goodness of the Lord during these weeks as we have reflected on the Lord's precious gift of himself to us in the Eucharist.

Indeed, every Sunday (or even every day if we like) we are privileged to taste the sweetness of the Lord spread out for us like a banquet at the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist.

Because of the Lord's goodness we are invited to feast on God's Word and on the Body and Blood of Christ.

The "table of the Word" is prefigured in the First Reading.

Lady Wisdom prepares her feast and calls out to all who seek understanding to come eat her food and drink her wine.

She urges all to "forsake foolishness that you may live."

The "foolish" are those who fill themselves with the "junk food" of worldly thinking and are therefore not hungry or thirsty for the wisdom God offers.

In today's Second Reading St. Paul exhorts his readers - and us - to live, not like foolish persons, but like the wise.

He cautions us not to get drunk on the wine of debauchery - the earthly "spirits" that cloud our ability to discern clearly - but to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus offers his teaching and his example as real food and real drink to those who believe in him.

By feasting on his Word we are filled with his Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and truth.

But believing in Jesus is not enough.

"Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you do not have life within you."

This is the profound mystery of the Eucharist and the supreme gift of Jesus to those who believe in him.

Jesus promises that if we feed on him, we will have life because of him. He will remain in us, and we will remain in him.

Jesus declares: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life."

In other words, through our reception of Holy Communion with Jesus eternal life begins for us now.

As one theologian puts it: "Our Eucharistic union with Jesus begins an internal transformation that propels us towards eternal life."

And yet, "feeding on Jesus" is not enough.

By receiving Communion, we are making a solemn commitment to continue the ministry of Jesus, and to offer our lives as he did in love for God and love for our neighbor.

All of this is what we experience and celebrate in the liturgy of the Mass.

We are drawn to the Liturgy by God who gathers us together in Christian fellowship.

Filled with the "intoxication" of the Holy Spirit, we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, "giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."

We feast at the table of divine wisdom.

Then we bring the gifts that God has graciously given us to the altar.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they are transformed into the Body and Blood of our risen and glorified Lord.

And, when we receive Holy Communion, Jesus abides in us, and we abide in him.

I want to take this opportunity to again remind us of how precious a time this is.

The moments leading up to and those following our reception of Holy Communion are the closest we come to Jesus on this side of heaven.

One of the reasons we purify the vessels at the altar after Communion is to give us all more time to commune with our Eucharistic Lord whom we have just received.

So please don't sit there watching the purification of the vessels. Close your eyes and talk to Jesus who now dwells within you in a most special way.

Then, nourished at his holy banquet with the "Real Presence" of Jesus, we are sent forth to make Jesus present in the world.

Through the Eucharist we have the foretaste and promise of eternal life. That faith gives us hope, and that hope gives us the courage to live and love as Jesus did.