

**3 Easter, A, 2008**  
**St. Raphael, Springdale, AR**

A friend recently introduced me to a new Catholic diet program. Like other diet programs it also requires you to eat healthy food, and exercise regularly. But the reason this program is “Catholic” is if you over eat, or get lazy and don’t exercise, then you have to go to confession. As you can see, it is guaranteed to make you lose weight! But one fascinating component of the program is how you look at food, and it offers a new approach toward food itself. That is, instead of seeing food as merely a moment to calm your hunger, and fill your stomach, she said you should really see a meal as a time to be with another person and get to know each other. In other words, at a meal the *food* is not the focus, your *friend* is. That reminds me of the first time I asked a girl on a date. It was back in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I was so nervous, I was sweating bullets. Speaking to 1000 people at Mass every Sunday is a cinch compared to that...guess that’s why I’m here! Now, I wanted to really impress her but I was on a limited budget, so I called her up and said, “Would you like to get something to eat...at Taco Bell?” No joke, that’s really what I said. Mr. Casanova I am not! And she politely replied, “No thank you, I’m not interested.” Her loss, right!? But even though I knew nothing about romance, I did know something about food: its real purpose is not just to fill your stomach, but rather for friendship, intimacy, communion with another person.

Today’s gospel is taken from the great 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, where the disciples also learn that a meal is not just to

foster earthly friendship, but also for the sake of heavenly communion. Two disciples are on the way to Emmaus and Jesus joins them on their walk, but they don't recognize Him. They discuss the Scriptures. They insist that He stay for supper and as they share the bread, they suddenly recognize it is Jesus. What's really going on? Well, St. Luke is describing what happens at every Mass: first we read and discuss the Bible, and then we break bread, receive Communion and know Jesus intimately. You see, the disciples discovered the real meaning of a meal: not just to satisfy their physical hunger, but to satisfy their deeper hunger: to know and love the Lord. That's what food is really for, especially the Bread and Wine of the Mass.

We all have different relationships with food. For some of us, food is our best friend and we may even suffer from some addiction to food. That's why you hear phrases like "comfort food," where we seek solace and comfort in food rather than friends. At the other extreme we find people who shun food all together; those who suffer from anorexia and actually starve themselves in order to lose weight. I recently heard this little joke regarding food. At a Catholic school the children were finishing their lunch. A rather stern nun had put a sign on the table with a plate full of delicious apples: "Take only one! God is watching." At the far end of the table was a plate full of cookies. A student had put up a sign there which read: "Take all you want, God is watching the apples." Sometimes that's the way we approach food: get all I can as long as God doesn't notice. But that's a far cry from

the real purpose of food: to foster friendship between one another and with God.

Folks, every Sunday Jesus invites us to share a meal with Him, not just to taste a little bread and wine, but to experience intimate communion with Him. And what is our reply? Sometimes we treat Mass like a “drive through” and leave right after Communion, and are still chewing Holy Communion as we start our cars. Some Catholics I affectionately call “CEO Catholics,” not because they are chief executive officers, but because they come to Mass on Christmas and Easter Only. How can you possibly know the Lord if you only stop to break bread with Jesus two times a year? And still for others the Mass is merely another obligation, one more item I have to check off my “To Do List.” We think: I’m glad that’s over with, let’s move on to something more interesting and enjoyable. Last Sunday it was so edifying to see so many parishioners stay after Mass in St. Raphael Hall to eat and enjoy fellowship: Anglos and Hispanics alike. Last Sunday, food had achieved its highest purpose: foster friendship among people and God.

Folks, I’m no Casanova, but I’ve learned that you’ve got to do better than Taco Bell if you want to get the girl. So, now I’m inviting you to share with me the Holy Eucharist, the Bread of Angels, the Body and Blood of Jesus. And if you turn me down, it really will be your loss.

Praised be Jesus Christ!