

Homily
July 2, 2023
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
20:13 - 31:01

I don't know if you have heard, but buffets are back!

In the New York Times this past week it declared that after three years of near-bankruptcy, buffets are on their storming way back. Oh, goody!

Think of it. Cafeteria. When I spent time at Notre Dame, they renovated the cafeteria, the dining hall. Oh, my goodness. It went from being a line, to this section, that section, that section. You could choose what kind of food you wanted and how it was prepared. It was absolutely amazing.

Then of course, we have Shapiro's downtown, just south of downtown. What a wonderful place to go. You know, they even put the desserts first in the line? And of course, the Chinese Buffet, a Thai Buffet, a Japanese / Sushi Buffet.

You know why we like them? Because we can pick and choose our preferences. You decide what goes on your plate. And for some of us, that's a thrill when we're younger.

But there's also something not-so-good about it. We get our food, we go to the table and we bolt our food down, not savoring it, not tasting it. Not discriminating spices, or subtleties, or even taste contradictions. But rather we bolt it down and then move on to go back to the line to pick up some more. And what do we get at the end? "Oh, I'm too full. I ate too much."

Hold onto "cafeteria."

In our First Reading and Gospel, there are profound examples of hospitality. The first is physical hospitality. We see the Shunamite woman caring for the needs of Elisha, the prophet. Why?

Because in his ministry of prophet he would wander towards Mount Carmel, where he would be closer to God. Kind of like a retreat center.

Then he would come back, and he'd need a place to stay after that 15-mile journey. And she cared for his needs, as we heard in the reading. She fed him. They listened to him. She named him, "Man of God." And then they created a special room on the roof for him. And furnished it, that he might have a place to be physically safe and cared for.

In the Gospel we hear that those who receive the disciples provided physical comforts. We know that it's true, as we've explored this before: the ancient customs for hospitality to stranger and friend. Well, they were still living those in Jesus' time.

There are other moments in the Gospels where such physical hospitality to Jesus and his disciples is as well displayed.

But there's another kind of hospitality that we see in both readings – **spiritual hospitality**. Spiritual Hospitality is an openness to the Word of God, respect for the messenger, attentive listening and then grappling with the truths and ideas that either prophet or disciple speak.

We hear this of the Shunamite woman. She listens to Elisha, the Man of God, and she finds great benefit in that. So much so as she has listened, so through his servant, Elisha comes to know her greatest need – a son. Her husband is old. Without a son, as she becomes a widow, there's no one to take care of her.

She has listened. The prophet has listened. And there's more to the story if you go and read the two chapters about this encounter.

And those who receive the disciples' preaching or teaching and ministry also find great benefit. They hear Jesus' words. They hear of Jesus through the disciples. They witness cures and attentive care.

Physical and spiritual hospitality in our own time and culture still exists, doesn't it? I love traveling in different countries to find out, "what is hospitality, here?" In China it's one thing. In Japan it's another. Germany, France, you name it – every culture has a way of being physically hospitable.

I have a friend who yesterday flew with his family to Japan, where his wife originated. And they took a whole suitcase filled with gifts. Japanese hospitality has to do with gift-giving. Now, they're going to give those gifts when they arrive. And they're going to fill that suitcase back up with the gifts that they're given. That's just part of the hospitality of that culture.

Physical hospitality is a gift of consistent care.

But spiritual hospitality, my brothers and sisters, in our own time, is waning. Our individualistic culture and tribalism often militate against such hospitality. Our "need to be right" versus "our need to be open to understand" is out of balance. Why should I work at listening, when I already have "the

truth?" "Why should I work at understanding, when I find that I have to work to accept the validity of another's idea or thought processes?"

We have become, more than not – all of us - "cafeteria thinkers." We get our ideas. We sit at the table and we share them with people of like kind and mind.

And my brothers and sisters, we are all "cafeteria Catholics," if we are honest with ourselves.

For example, our approach to the Bible. We hear Jesus' teachings in the New Testament and that of the Early Church in the writings of the Apostles. **God's Word**. We pick and choose the bits and pieces to form our own Gospel at times. And we pass-by the entries that we do not like. "Oh, Paul cooked that one up. Leave it alone. Pass it by."

And we do the same with religious leaders. You know, in my lifetime, the popes have been: Pope Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis I. Each one in the Spirit and in their time, try to speak to the moments in which they lived and to the people of that time and place. And very often, across all of those, there were those who ignored, or left behind bits and pieces.

And the Archbishops in my lifetime: Archbishops Schulte, Biskup, O'Meara, Buechlein, Tobin and Thompson. It's the same. Men of their time, in the Spirit, trying to lead an Archdiocese. And they were very different. From the regal Paul Schulte to the diminutive Biskup, and now another diminutive, Thompson. And in-between, someone as large as Joseph Tobin -- all leading the people of God and trying to teach and preach and keep us as one.

You know my brothers and sisters, the Word of God calls us to spiritual hospitality to the teacher, the prophet, the elder. To the words they speak - the truths they speak, they try to place them before us in the name of the Church and in the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Their words are not to be cafeteria-styled, but rather pondered, savored, chewed-upon for their subtlety. They're speaking to the times and the needs of our now, rooted in what has gone before and leading to the future.

There is a wonder of a buffet that we call God's Word in the Scriptures. There is an important part of that, which is the teachings of the Church. We are all called to Spiritual Hospitality – to ponder, to spend time, to use carefully the gifts we have been given, to learn and then to live what we have learned.

