

Easter 3A, Hickory Neck Episcopal Church, 4 May 2014
The Reverend Henry P. McQueen
Acts 2:14a,36-41; Ps 116:1-3, 10-17; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

S.D.G.

Think about a dinner invitation that you have received, either recently or in the past. You are very excited to go and break bread with the host; both food and company promise to be fulfilling. But somewhere in the back of your mind you also know that you should reciprocate the invitation.

It's not a quid pro quo situation, but a return invitation will allow the conversation and friendship to continue and grow in unexpected and wondrous ways. The challenge that is presented though, is that this host is an exquisite chef whose meals rival anything you have ever tasted. There is a feeling that your mac 'n cheese just won't measure up to their chateaubriand.

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, wrote in the early 5th century and referenced the Proverbs of Solomon (most likely a different translation than we find today). He tells us "If you sit down to eat at the table of a ruler, observe carefully what is set before you; then stretch out your hand, knowing that you must provide the same kind of meal yourself."

For the recipient of a dinner invitation we might wish that Augustine had never brought these words to light. However, for those who know Augustine you know where I am going, and it is not to dinner, it is to a feast much more glorious, it is to the Altar.

Looking more closely upon his words we are to understand that to sit at the table of a ruler invites us to sit with humility. We don't approach a ruler with bravado, humility is the proper stature. To "observe closely what is set before you" is more appropriately described in the words of Augustine as "meditate devoutly on so great a gift."

In this manner, with humility and prayer, we prepare ourselves for the greatest feast, the gift of Holy Eucharist.

The story of the road to Emmaus provides the inspiration that brings us the well known painting *Supper at Emmaus* by Caravaggio. The baroque painting depicts the moment just prior to the disciples seeing with whom they are dining. Jesus' hand is in the

position of offering a blessing, and then a moment later when he breaks the bread Cleopas and his companion will understand with whom they dine. They have not yet realized the commitment that is expected of them when they share this meal.

Perhaps not as well known, but to my eyes even more powerful and I encourage you to google it, is the painting entitled *The Moorish Kitchen Maid* by Diego Velazquez. In the background of this painting is the table with the Risen Christ and his two disciples. Prominent in the foreground is a young black kitchen maid. She is making an effort to appear busy and uninterested, but her attention is focused upon the special guest, Christ. Her facial expression betrays the hidden secret that she knows, well before the disciples do, who is at the table. A poem by Denise Levertov describes the scene as follows.

The Servant-Girl at Emmaus (A Painting by Velazquez)

She listens, listens, holding
her breath. Surely that voice
is his - the one
who had looked at her, once, across the crowd,
as no one ever had looked?
Had seen her? Had spoken as if to her?

Surely those hands were his,
taking the platter of bread from hers just now?
Hands he'd laid on the dying and made them well?

Surely that face—?

As the poems continues it is clear she knows he is the Risen Christ, and the disciples are without understanding. This servant girl has come to the table with humility, not the bravado seen earlier in Cleopas as he declared "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" Her humility allows her to bask in the presence of Christ longer than those who are in the dark. The servant girl also seems to have meditated devoutly upon the great gift that is offered. She recognizes his face, his hands, his voice. She sensed that even far away in the crowd that He was talking directly to her, she allowed his spirit to enlighten her life. The

kitchen maid was prepared to provide the same kind of meal that was being offered to her by the Risen Christ.

Augustine describes the meal that is being offered by referring to the writings of Saint John the Evangelist. John tells us that “No one has greater love than those who lay down their lives for their friends” (Jn 15.13).

Christ died for us, He has shown us the greatest love by offering his life. And he has shown us so that we can do likewise; in the words of John “we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (1Jn 3:16).

As we approach the Altar, the meal that we are given is His body and blood; Augustine reminds us that, in return, we are to “provide the same kind of meal.”

“then stretch out your hand, knowing that you must provide the same kind of meal yourself.” Augustine brings forth the words of Saint John as he tells us that we are to be prepared to offer our body and blood to Christ, as well as to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Few of us will ever be called to make the same sacrifice as the many martyrs who have come before us, and who will continue in the world after us. But if we are to faithfully receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, then we are to also offer our body and blood to Christ, and to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The obligation to offer our selves, our souls and bodies, is ever present.

Reach out your hands, and in doing so provide the same kind of meal.

Amen,



Supper at Emmaus
Caravaggio



The Moorish Kitchen Maid
Diego Velazquez