

Homily for June 6, 2010 (Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ)
Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:1-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 9:11b-17

First Lady Michelle Obama recently announced that several of the largest food companies in the USA have committed to removing 1.5 trillion calories from their products by 2015, particularly those that are marketed to children and teens. Mrs. Obama, who worked for the University of Chicago Hospitals prior to her husband's election in 2008, has made improving the health and fitness of our children one of her primary causes.

It's not a moment too soon. It is estimated that one third of our nation's kids are overweight or obese. The seriousness of this was brought home to me a couple of years ago when the leaders of a high school told me that some of their students were already suffering from high blood pressure and diabetes.

As we gather for church this morning, over one billion people in the world are undernourished; but nearly 1.5 billion are either overweight or obese. Americans spend over \$52 billion per year on weight loss products and programs. At the same time, our country provides only \$2.6 billion in global food aid—one-twentieth of what we spend fighting "the battle of the bulge" at home.

Last week, on Trinity Sunday, we recalled that it is part of God's nature to be in relationship and how God wants to be in relationship with us. Today we celebrate the great gift of the Eucharist, Christ's Body and Blood, our communion with God and with each other. In doing so we are also called to wrestle with the fact that we are too often overfed and too often also undernourished.

This is as true the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of our lives as it is in the physical. Through the internet and other technologies, we have unprecedented access to information; but many lack the skills to sort through it all. Through cable TV we now have hundreds of stations available to us; but too often there is little worth watching.

Through the modern medicine and pharmacology, we can take one drug to get us up, another to bring us down, and still another to keep us "on the beam." But none of them can really make us happy or bring us peace. Many people now claim to be "spiritual" rather than "religious" but find it a lot easier to tell you what they don't believe than what they do.

In the midst of these intellectual, emotional, spiritual and even physical "food deserts" Christ share with us a simple meal of bread and wine and invites us to do what he did: take, thank, bless, break, and share.

Take—In our gospel reading, Jesus' disciples wanted him to send the crowds away to "the surrounding villages and farms to find lodging and provisions" after he had been teaching them all day. St. Luke doesn't go into detail about what motivated the disciples. They knew that they didn't have much, and perhaps they

wanted to avoid the embarrassment of admitting it. Maybe they didn't think that feeding the crowds was their responsibility; or perhaps they were just tired and wanted a break.

Whatever the case, Jesus didn't let them off the hook. To their amazement and dismay, he told his disciples "Give them some food themselves." With five loaves and two fish for a crowd of thousands, it seemed like a grim joke. But they brought what they had to Jesus.

Thank—"Looking up to heaven," Jesus "said the blessing" over what they had. Recalling the ancient act of Melchizedek, the king of Salem (the name means "complete or perfect peace" in Hebrew) who offered bread and wine in thanksgiving and blessing after Abram defeated a number of Canaanite kings in his effort to rescue his nephew Lot, Jesus gave thanks. He did it not only for what God his Father had done in providing the loaves and fishes but also for what God was *going to do* in feeding the multitude.

Break—Jesus broke the fish and bread and "gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd." This was also an act of faith: Jesus handed over what had formerly belonged to him and his disciples. As St. Paul recalled in our second reading, Jesus deepened the meaning of this gesture even more when on the eve of his suffering and death he broke bread and shared a cup saying, "This is my body that is for you....This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

Share—In celebrating that final Passover with his disciples, he invited them to follow his example, "Do this in remembrance of me." Just as the disciples gathered up twelve baskets of leftovers after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, we are called to gather up the overabundant graces we receive in the Eucharist and to share them with others.

This is a primary essence of our celebration: the communion that we celebrate with God and with each other cannot be confined to the time of our liturgy or the walls of the place where we gather. St. Paul's remembrance of the Last Supper—one that is older than any in the gospels—was motivated by his frustration at witnessing the disconnection between what the church in Corinth was celebrating liturgically and how they were actually treating each other.

They couldn't celebrate unity and be divided. They couldn't celebrate God's justice and treat each other unjustly. They couldn't give thanks if, as they gathered, some were stuffed and drunk while others were left hungry and thirsty. (For your Bible homework this week, spend some time reading and reflecting on 1 Corinthians 11:17-24. You'll get a better sense of Paul's aggravation!)

As we take, thank, bless, break and share all of the blessings that God has given us; and as we bring ourselves and our gifts before the Lord in the faith that he can do "far more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20), may not only be fed but also nourished and strengthened to serve and feed others as Jesus did. +