

## **Homily – What We Eat Matters**

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It is good to be back with you after being gone for three months. I have missed being with you, and I am grateful to our Sr. Warden, David Ottesen, our Deacon, Susan Arnold, and so many others who made sure our community continues thrive. Thank you also to Karen Siegfriedt and Doug Edwards for celebrating on Sunday mornings. We are very blessed. As David said to me, your time away would have been easy, except for Covid. Vaccines, and masks, and the Delta-variant all make a healthy life complicated. We aren't moving forward in a straight line and that can be disconcerting. And, as was expected, Covid also changed my sabbatical quite a bit from the original plans. I was going to walk the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain and go to a Spanish language school in Costa Rica, but instead I had a lot of downtime with my mother on the family farm in upstate New York, and a lot of quiet time at home. I took two online classes, and my sabbatical had a lot of silence, stillness, and solitude. It seems like we were already getting a lot of this in 2020, but for me, life ramped down for the last three months. Again, it was filled with silence, stillness, and solitude. Today, I want to make the case that this is what all of us need. To live into the beauty that God has already created in each and every one of us, we all need practices that instill silence, stillness, and solitude. These contemplative practices are the antidote to the things that separate us from God and others.

Today's Gospel reading is about another antidote to separation and this is with a dose of some very special food and drink. In today's teaching from Jesus, he shares the significance bread and wine should lead in our lives. In some mysterious way the bread and wine we use in the Sacrament of the Eucharist or Holy Communion, in some way these become the body and blood of Christ. The bread and the wine are the perfect union of spirit and matter, a union that is the essence of Christ, the same Christ that we have throughout all of time and space. So, when we eat the bread and drink the wine we are putting Christ into our bodies in a very special way.

We all know that what we put into our bodies is important. Over indulgence in alcohol, misuse of drugs, and even the regular drinking of sugar water have a negative impact on our bodies. One of the reasons I like using the Blue Apron meal service is that I know exactly what is going into the meal. Jeff and I pay special attention to the foods we eat, though I have a reputation of being a bit more persnickety. I have three categories of forbidden foods. First, there are foods that I think are gross like broccoli, cauliflower, beets, and mushrooms. Many of you like these foods but for me the ick factor is high. Then there are food allergies. All of our bodies are different, and my food allergies are soy and peanuts. I don't stop breathing, but allergy testing has revealed that soy and peanuts were doing some

nasty things to my body. Maybe you have food allergies that you don't even know about. The third category of forbidden foods is food intolerances. A few years ago, I had some blood testing which showed me about a dozen foods to avoid if I wanted to lower inflammation in my body. This third category is annoying because they are foods that I like, and they are foods and spices that are in a lot of things. So maybe I am persnickety about food, but it feels healthy. Are you also careful about what you put into your body? Or maybe you are careful to avoid falls, or to get enough sleep, or not to drive at night, or to get exercise. We all have a list of do's and don'ts so that our bodies stay healthy. And, it seems like the list gets a longer as we get older. We take care because our embodied lives are important.

Our spiritual lives are also important. As human beings we all have a physical side of life, a mental side of life, and a spiritual side of life. We pay a lot of attention to our embodied lives, but many of us don't put as much care into our spiritual lives. Prayer, worship, Bible study, and service are all important spiritual practices. These are practices that we are pretty good at here at St. Barnabas. These common practices are all meaningful in leading us into healthier relationship with God, others, and self. But, as I wander through life, I am beginning to realize that contemplative spiritual practices are the component of life that most of us are missing.

The simple definition of the word contemplation is to think about an action before doing it. However, in the spiritual life, contemplation is an inner way of seeing that transcends rational thinking. It is a way to see God in and around us. If I learned anything on sabbatical it is that I have got to have regular practices of contemplation in my life. At the moment my goal is to have two twenty minutes sessions each day. We all need to incorporate prayer, meditation, and mindfulness into our daily living. And, through these contemplative practices we achieve silence, stillness, and solitude. As I said earlier these are the antidote to the things that ail us.

Now, I used to be afraid of silence. Yet all the ancient mystics understood that silence is vital to bringing the fragmented parts of self into a vibrant whole. The sixteenth-century Spanish mystic John of the Cross wrote, "Silence is God's first language." Slowly, I've learned to appreciate its value in my own healing and growth, but there are still times that silence is that last thing that I want. Times of quiet can be hard, but these times invite us to consider ways of praying that are new to us. Contemplation is a type of prayer that requires the full self, the whole person in the presence of God. This is a type of prayer that often doesn't use words. And, like I said there are times that I am afraid of silence. For you see, in silence, I'm unable to control my environment. In silence, I'm forced to face myself, allowing all my fears, shame, guilt, and resentments to come to the surface. In silence, my ambition and drive slow down just enough for my mind to come up with new thoughts, unwanted

to-do lists, and more ideas that I know what to do with. Sometimes silence is just downright exhausting. In other words, silence is usually a huge workout for the soul.

But with practice come moments of breaking through the internal chaos. I experience the grace of letting go of my insecurities and fears of not being in control or liked. And then, with silence I find love. Love from God. Love for God. Love from others. Love for others, And, love from myself, and love for myself.

“In her book *Pilgrimage of a Soul*, Phileena Heuertz says that contemplative spirituality carves the posture of surrender or letting go, into the fabric of our being, making us receptive to transformation. She goes on: “Contemplative spirituality is a state of being. It’s the portal to the direct life-giving presence of God. When rooted in contemplative spirituality we are more receptive and supple in the hands of God; the life of Christ flows more freely through us. Phileena writes, “By abandoning ourselves regularly to God through prayer in the form of solitude, silence and stillness, we experience more freedom from compulsions and more liberty in our True Self with all of our unique gifts to offer the world.”

Giving ourselves to solitude, silence, and stillness not only nurtures the inner spirituality our souls long for but it also quiets the mind in a way that offers us the chance to make major corrections, walk slower, and lift our heads a little higher to see things we haven’t seen before. Contemplative practices affect every part of us and our relationships. And, as we are transformed the world is changed.

Contemplative practices allow us to see God in the world all around us. Through the noise and busyness of life we lose sight of God. For many of us, our lives reflect this blindness. My understanding is that Christ is across all of time and space. Before the beginning of time the first emanation from God was the Christ, the perfect union of spirit and matter. And with creation Christ is in all and around all. Two thousand years ago, perhaps when humanity was finally ready for it, Christ came into the world as a baby boy that we call Jesus. Jesus was and is the perfect union of human and divine. This is the presence that we see in the bread and the wine when we share Holy Communion. This is what we ingest into our bodies. But here is a little secret that is not much of a secret. You and I are already the union of spirit and matter, just like Jesus. We are not perfect but we were created by God for beauty. With silence, stillness and solitude we are better able to see God, we are better able to experience the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, and we are better able to live into the beauty that God has created in each and every one of us. What you eat matters. May you thrive in body and spirit. And as we say in Communion, take this bread and drink this cup and you will have life everlasting.