

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

In the early Sixties, in Jacksonville, the Universal Marion Building opened for business. The first six floors were occupied by Ivey's Department store, but it was the top floor, the eighteenth floor that drew all the attention. "The Embers" was said to be the largest rotating restaurant in the world, completing 360 degrees every 1 ½ hours. The view of the St. Johns' River was stunning. And it was there that I tried a delicacy for the first time.

With my father and Aunt Mary Beth, we went for a dinner and the view. I cannot remember what I ordered that night; it was what Mary Beth ate that was the center of my attention.

Of course, I had heard of lobster but the appearance of this shelled creature turned me off. There was no way I was going to eat the meat that came out of this prehistoric looking animal. Mary Beth kept prodding me and urging me to give it a try. She pierced a piece and dipped it in butter and handed me the fork. To please her, I placed it in my mouth, chewed and swallowed. Well, folks, the rest is history. Since that night on the top of the Ivey's Building, I can rightfully say that I have never turned down lobster and never will!

Mary Beth Allen was not really my "Aunt" but had been married to my mother's first cousin; he had been killed while flying Navy jets off the USS FDR. And out of love and respect, she was and always will be Aunt Mary Beth. The moment was not just about this new strange food but about a relationship. I cannot think about one without remembering the other. It was a banquet; it was a communion if you will among friends.

The Gospel Reading follows a similar plot line. On face value, the verses are very troubling. When I was first exposed to the New Testament and the words of Jesus, I have to say that I did not know how to take John 6. And I know that I am not alone. Recently, while taking communion to a member of the congregation, when reading these words, I was stopped and the communicant shared with me that these words were still upsetting and that surely Jesus was not referring to a form of cannibalism.

I just finished reading "Last Hope Island", a retelling of the Battle of Britain but from the vantage point of the Dutch, French, Norwegians, Czechs and others who fled to England. In referring to the importance of the BBC and the uplifting words that were transmitted across the English Channel every night, a Czech girl wrote: "People who are almost too poor to buy bread have now a radio. They need it. A man told me, 'The stomach is hungry but the soul still more so'."

When I read the Gospel verses, in preparation for, today, that night in Jacksonville came to mind and that perhaps Jesus is talking about something above and beyond the obvious. Maybe it is about relationships. Maybe it is referring to food for the soul.

The Reverend Michael Marsh offers the following: "Jesus is talking about more than just physical or biological life. He's talking about that life that is beyond words, indescribable, and yet we know it when we taste it. We get a taste of it when we love so deeply and profoundly that

everything about us dies, passes away, and somehow we are more fully alive than ever before. Sometimes everything seems to fit together perfectly and all is right with the world; not because we got our way but because we knew our self to be a part of something larger, more beautiful, and more holy than anything we could have done. We were tasting life. There are moments when time stands still and we wish the moment would never end. In that moment we are in the flow, the wonder, and the unity of life, and it tastes good.”

That night, sitting in the Embers, it was more than that succulent meat, dipped in butter; it was looking up and seeing that smile on Mary Beth’s face, not mockery but just love. I believe that when we go to the communion table and eat his flesh and drink his blood Jesus is smilingly lovingly at each one of us.

Story number two. Christopher de Vinck tells the story of the husband and father who has finally had it and decides to run away. “I was tired and fed up. My wife was tired and fed up. I decided that I was going to run away from it all and have a day just for me....I was going to live it up and be just as greedy as I pleased.

I zoomed out of the house with fifty dollars. There! I did it! I said to myself as I drove to the highway and headed north.

Well, I drove to a mall and had a wild time in a bookstore and bought the collected poems of Walt Whitman. After that I drove and drove to a McDonald’s and ordered two hamburgers, my own large fries, and my own large soda. I ate everything without being interrupted, without giving my pickle to anyone, without wiping someone’s mouth, nose, lap. Then I bought the biggest chocolate ice cream I could find.

I was free. I was out of town. So I drove to a movie theater and watched a movie without buying popcorn, without someone sitting on my lap, without escorting someone to the bathroom. I was a free man. I was living it up.

And I was miserable.

By the time I returned home everyone was asleep. As I slipped into bed, my wife whispered, “We missed you.” “Me too”, I answered.

I never ran away from home again.

I do not believe that the lobster would have tasted the same if I had been eating alone. I would have been miserable. I do not believe that the “body of Christ the bread of heaven” and the “blood of Christ the cup of salvation” would taste the same if I was the sole person receiving it. This is what Jesus is talking about in the Gospel of John. It is more than bread and wine. It is about how much God loves each and everyone one of us; and how we are “charged” with loving our neighbor in the same unconditional way.

Jesus is telling us we may require food to satisfy one hunger; but there is another hunger that needs to be satisfied; and it cannot be found on our own. Frederick Buechner puts it this way.

“We hunger to be known and understood. We hunger to be loved. We hunger to be at peace inside our own skins. We hunger not just to be fed these things but, often without realizing it,

we hunger to feed others these things because they too are starving for them...when Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves, it was not just for neighbors' sakes that he commanded it, but for our own sakes as well.'

In a little while we will taste the "body of Christ the bread of heaven" and the "blood of Christ the cup of salvation". Let us all remember that this is special bread given to us, bread that has come down from heaven, unlike the bread our ancestors ate.

It is a reminder that God will be with us and for us and to abide with us forever. It is a reminder that **all** our hungers will be satisfied and we will **never** be left wanting.

Amen