

EAT. PRAY. LOVE.
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October 3, 2010 – World Communion Sunday

Readings: Psalm 133
Luke 17:5-6; 11:1-4; 22:14-19
John 13:34-35

Psalm 133

¹How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

²It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.

³It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

Luke 17:5-6

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Luke 22:14-19

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Luke 11:1-4

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' ²He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.

John 13:34-35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Eat pray love. 182 weeks on the best seller list. Over seven million copies in print – all but seven copies sold to women. A featured book on *Oprah* – and you know what *that* means. And, as they say, as of this summer, *Eat Pray Love* is also a major motion picture.

Now, for the benefit of the men who are present today, this is the story line. In a sense, the complete title says it all: *Eat Pray Love: one woman's search for everything across Italy, India, and Indonesia.* In the book author Elizabeth Gilbert writes of her own quest to find and have it all. And apparently she succeeds – she got an advance to write the book and to fund her romp across Europe, South Asia, and Micronesia – and then she made a whole ton of money after Oprah's blessing.

The story is set up when an Indonesian holy man tells the author she will find happiness, fulfillment, and love – in that order. Shortly thereafter, plagued with despair after a nasty divorce, the author divides a year equally among three dissimilar countries, exploring her competing urges for earthly delights and divine transcendence. First, she tastes pleasure: savoring Italy's buffet of delights--the world's best pizza, free-flowing wine and dashing conversation partners. Gilbert literally consumes *la dolce vita*. "I came to Italy pinched and

thin," she writes, but soon fills out in waist and soul. Next, prayer and ascetic rigor are her quest. She seeks communion with the divine at a sacred ashram in India, emulating the ways of yogis in grueling hours of meditation, struggling to still her churning mind. Finally, in Bali, Gilbert studies with a merry medicine man and plunges into a charged love affair. Eat pray love.

The book has sparked a new standard for brevity in mission statements. Gone is the prose of "Put a man on the moon by the end of the decade." Or General Electric's, "We bring good things to life". Following the lead of *Eat Pray Love*, now we hear from Air France that the airline is *New Fast Efficient* and that Monsanto's products are *Food Health Hope*. Nike cuts to the chase with just TWO words: *huge quickly*.

Maybe the church should follow suit. We probably DO have too much verbiage anyway.

Perhaps faith can be reduced to *Repent Believe Serve*.

Or, echoing the Great Commission, *Go Baptize Teach*.

Or hearkening back to the prophet Micah, *Do show walk*, as in DO justice, SHOW mercy, WALK humbly with our God.

Or maybe *read reflect renew* or if you have a more evangelical slant, *repent believe witness*.

And on this communion Sunday, this WORLD communion Sunday, perhaps the rhythm of the Christian life just might be *Eat pray love*. And it all begins with EAT.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke we read that on the night of his betrayal, Jesus *EATS* with his disciples for the "Last Supper", which the church has transformed into the "Lord's Supper". At our Lord's Table, the Christian life begins. Yes, we are baptized first, of course.

But it is at the Table that we are spiritually nourished with what the first century church father Ignatius of Antioch called the “medicine of immortality.”

In the taking of the bread and the sharing of the cup we are cemented to the risen Lord and united with Christian disciples in this congregation and throughout the whole wide earth. It is here, at this table, that we are FED by our Lord for life and service in the world. As a traditional prayer following communion puts it, “Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves for others in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord”.

The Christian life begins here at our Lord’s Table. That is never more evident than today on World Communion Sunday. Today, around the world, Christians are joining in Holy Communion in awareness of and solidarity with one another. For one brief moment, at least, at our Lord’s Table, we really ARE one holy Catholic Church. We don’t BELIEVE all the same things (even about what happens in the sacrament). We don’t PRACTICE our faith the same way. We don’t celebrate this or the other sacrament of the church in the same manner or even for the same reasons. But we do EAT together.

And this eating together is more than consuming a little bread and wine. It is DINING. Dining with our Lord. Dining with EACH other. Dining *now* in anticipation of dining *later* at our Lord’s eternal table and feast. Not much of a feast, you say, a morsel of bread and drop of wine. Yet Jesus said, “If you have but the faith of a mustard seed, you could move mountains.” So also, if we but share one crumb and a drop of wine together in the name of the Lord Jesus, then we have a foretaste of the heavenly banquet of the Kingdom of God.

So today we eat. And then we *PRAY*. And our prayers define what we believe. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, is the Latin phrase. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* - literally, the law of prayer is the law of belief. What we believe flows from our prayers. We only believe that which we are prepared to pray for.

Which of course make the Lord's Prayer the most dangerous prayer ever written: *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* To offer such a prayer is to acknowledge God's total claim upon our lives and our world.

Eat. Pray. *LOVE*. Love is what we Christians *DO*. Love is the way Christians live. Love is the seal of the sacrament. Love is the motivation for our prayers. God *IS* love and those of us who "love God" find a way to love our neighbors as well.

The apostle Paul has his well-known hymn extolling love. But it is the evangelist John who has the most to say about love and the Christian life. John is the gospel writer most interested in the sacramental life, which is fascinating, because unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John does not portray Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper on the night of his betrayal. Instead, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment, "That you love one another." It makes me wonder, perhaps John is giving us an important, albeit subtle, interpretation of the sacrament of Holy Communion: Holy Communion only has meaning when it is enacted in lives of love.

What we *eat* at our Lord's Table, and the *prayers* we offer, ultimately are sealed in the *love* we have for one another and the pursuit of sacrificial love for our neighbors.

Eat. Pray. Love. The rhythm of the Christian life.

Eat. Pray. Love. In our gospel text from Luke for today, the disciples have three other words on their minds: **“Increase our faith.”** The disciples want to know how to grow in their faith. How to mature in their discipleship. Earlier these same disciples have asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, and he responds with the Lord’s Prayer. Here they ask for some pointers on the life of faith and somewhat exasperated, Jesus replies, “If you had faith the size of the tiny mustard seed, you could do anything you want.” Translation: “Guys, what have you been doing all this time? Haven’t you heard a thing I have said?”

A scholar with an eye for words notes that in the gospel of Luke the particular Greek word translated OBEY is used only twice: here in our text for today, and when Jesus calms the storm by commanding the seas to “Be still!” And the winds *OBEY*. In other words, Jesus says, if you had only a little faith – and a little faith is indeed all you have. If you have only a little faith, you can do all of the miracles attributed to me. Even a little faith goes a long way.

Now, wishing something to be true doesn’t make it true. But if we cannot IMAGINE a better world, how can we BUILD a better world? If we cannot IMAGINE that as Christians we all are one, how can we BE and BECOME one? If we cannot eat in Holy Communion with Christians around the world one Sunday a year, how can we ever be the one body of Christ in the world? If we cannot pray with sincerity the one prayer all Christians know, how can we really pray – or believe anything of importance? If we do not have love for one another, what good is faith anyway? BUT, if only we can eat, pray, love, THEN, if we say to a mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea.” And it would be done.

We have to imagine a better world to build a better world. But that better world we *imagine* will never come to pass until we *work* for it. World Communion remains only a vision, until it becomes our daily mission. When church unity becomes our highest goal, the church will be one. The movement from vision to reality is not as far removed as you might think. As Jesus reminds us, if you only have the faith of a mustard seed, you can uproot a huge tree.

Most of you know the story of Alexandra Scott better than I, since Lower Merion is where her family came to live. Shortly before her first birthday, Alex was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a type of childhood cancer. On her first birthday, the doctors at Penn informed Alex's parents that if she beat her cancer it was doubtful that she would ever walk again. Just two weeks later, Alex slightly moved her leg at her parents' request to kick. This was the first indication of who she would turn out to be - a determined, courageous, confident and inspiring child with big dreams and big accomplishments.

By her second birthday, Alex was crawling and able to stand up with leg braces. She worked hard to gain strength and to learn how to walk. She appeared to be beating the odds, until the shattering discovery the next year that her tumors had started growing again. In the year 2000, the day after her fourth birthday, Alex received a stem cell transplant and informed her mother, "When I get out of the hospital I want to have a lemonade stand." She said she wanted to give the money to doctors to allow them to "help other kids, like they helped me." True to her word, she held her first lemonade stand later that year and raised an amazing \$2,000 for "her hospital" – the University of Pennsylvania Hospital.

While bravely battling her own cancer, Alex continued to hold yearly lemonade stands in her front yard to benefit childhood cancer research. News spread of the remarkable sick

child dedicated to helping other sick children. People from all over the world, moved by her story, held their own lemonade stands and donated the proceeds to Alex and her cause.

In 2004, Alex died at the age of 8, knowing that, with the help of others, she had raised over \$1 million to help find a cure for the disease that took her life. Alex's family - and supporters around the world continue her inspiring legacy through Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation.

One little sick girl's vision has touched the lives and hopes of thousands.

Jesus said, "If you have only the faith of a mustard seed, you can move mountains!"

Friends: let us eat, pray, love in anticipation of what God is working in us. AMEN.