

What is your favorite food? And what food you would never touch? Do you eat just to fill up or do you savor what you swallow? Are you concerned about what food does to you or is taste and price your primary concern? Is eating a chore, an inconvenience, or a time of fellowship and rest and flavorful peace?

When Israel lived off of manna in the desert, that daily diet reminded them of their ties to God and their requirement to "watch what they ate." In other words, taking God seriously was a good diet, and ignoring God was considered "junk food that led to death." This gives the idea of "daily bread" a whole new meaning, as Jesus was talking about everything we need for life, and he didn't just mean bread!

Old Testament dietary laws (just like many of ours) make sense in terms of nutrition, but *will live forever...the bread I give for the life of the world is my flesh.*" Jesus affirmed that they also made sense in terms of giving God priority in our lives. Israel understood that every action in life, whether it was a family meal, or a business transaction was an act of worship. These laws and commands were called "living bread." The rabbis taught that to live according to God's law was the "right diet." So, the living bread was the food that kept them healthy! Israel understood they "were what they ate."

In this context Jesus said, *"I am living bread...whoever eats of this bread* because we ARE what we eat, we should embrace his death and resurrection, and digest the fact that faith in him grants a life with God that can never end. To live by faith is a diet that brings Jesus into every aspect of our living. Such a diet means He is the nourishment, heartbeat, and spiritual energy of every action in our lives.

In Genesis God said, there is a tree whose fruit gives life, and is a tree with bad fruit that you must ignore or else you will die! To which the serpent said, "Do what you want, God just wants to spoil your fun!" That same voice today proclaims, "Eat" what you want! If it feels good, do it. It is your body, your life, God just wants to ruin your fun. And the diet we are offered is sinful, selfish, incomplete, and always ends with death.

Separating oneself from the "real presence" of Jesus (from his body and blood, from his death and resurrection) is an unhealthy diet. Separating oneself from the community of faith, is like eating every meal in a car, alone, hurried, and uninspired. When living is in God's presence it has hope ... when it is self-centered it always ends at the grave.

Remember the tree in the garden God told Adam and Eve led only to death? Well it was transplanted on Calvary as "the cross" and that tree emphasizes the world's power and our defeat. What happens if you understand Jesus as the "replacement" for the forbidden fruit in Eden? As He embraced the death we deserve and cannot overcome, he became the new healthy "fruit" restoring what was lost.

Easter restores Eden's invitation to munch on "healthy food." And, just as manna reminded Israel that life is from God, so Holy Communion becomes our "foretaste" of the feast to come! It is true, we are what we eat! In Ephesians 5, Paul wrote, *"Don't get drunk with wine, but be filled with Spirit."* He was comparing different diets, saying *"don't let world intoxicate you by its power" rather let God be healthy diet!"*

Just as Moses often sat Israel down in front of Sinai to share God's guidance for daily living, so Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel sat everyone down around the mountain and taught them about a diet that results in faith, hope, and love – that never ends. And so, he rightly proclaimed, *"I am living bread. Whoever is one with me will never die!"*

I was asked to do an interview today to discuss Zion's anniversary. The question was "what do you attribute to Zion's long ministry when so many churches last such a short time. I told him that it is all God's doing, and what has made Zion unique is that our people know what the diet is that feeds them and the diet we are called to share with the world. If we are faithful to God's gifts and the opportunities he provides, then we will be doing what he calls us to do. That means *"make Jesus your daily diet, and he will keep you in a good relationship with God and each day will work out OK. If God takes care of birds and flowers which don't worry or work, he will certainly take care of you."*

There has never been a greater promise in all of history. "If I am in you – you are in me! What a diet this is! This is crucial, because the choices we make in daily lives are all

about what we eat. As we wander through all the cafeteria choices that are available, what will we choose? Will it be what we call common sense, fairness, cultural relativity, or will it be what we understand is the only "living bread?" As we wrestle with abortion, or capital punishment, or immigration policy, or end of life issues, or even the definition of marriage we need to first understand God's life and nourishment first.

What then, does your food pyramid look like? Is God on the top, or are you? What choices do we make and how faithful is that process? Remember, you are what you eat! The good news is that Jesus has acted to restore a healthy diet for all!

Our world still lives under the shadow of two trees. The garden tree that looks so enticing is the one God warns us to avoid – its fruit is bitter and leads only to death. The Calvary tree looks stark and empty (to worldly people) but is the one from which Jesus chose to use to provide us with new fruit of an eternal and loving harvest.

From Calvary and the empty tomb, Jesus offered himself as the one fruit for all seasons, a diet for all tastes, and the only nourishment and strength for eternal life.

In a few months we will lift up our own trees, make them shine for all to see, and sing, "from heaven above to earth I come." When that happens, remember what we are talking about today, and about how God took the a tree that best represents the brokenness of the world and turned it into the place that produces the sweetest and most lasting fruit of all. That living bread is the Light of Christmas and Easter!

What a gift it is that heaven has come to us, bringing new manna, the Bread of Life! And we are all blessed as we stay on our diet, especially with the assurance that even when we grow weak, God forgives and encourages us to start eating right again. He is like manna from heaven! And remember, you are what you eat!