

Third Sunday of Easter 2017
St. Mary's Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael Renninger

Raspberry Custard Pie.

My mom made the best raspberry custard pie.

In fact, she also made custard pies with fresh peaches, blackberries, and other fruits. And at Thanksgiving, she did not make ordinary pumpkin pie. She made pumpkin custard pie.

When my mom got married, someone gave her a copy of the *Betty Crocker Cookbook*. For people under the age of the 30, this was back in the dark ages when you actually had to buy a book to get recipes! There were no food apps or web pages available. Blue Apron didn't send food to your house with instructions.

This *Betty Crocker Cookbook* was actually more like a three ring binder: you could pull the rings open and remove the recipe pages.

And one of the pages was for a 'simple custard pie.'

Mom already knew how to make a great pie crust. The secret is butter... or Crisco... or both, I guess. Don't mix it to well. Let it rest.

Then she would mix the ingredients for the simple custard filling, which, when done, was a liquid. Then she would pour the liquid into the pie crust, and, carefully, take the pie with the liquid filling and try her best to put it into the oven without the liquid sloshing over the sides.

My mom did not swear much, but every once in a while she might bump that uncooked pie, and the liquid custard would fall on to the bottom of the oven, creating a mess and sending my mom to confession.

And, when the season was right, she would put fresh fruit into the custard just before it cooked solid.

Resulting in a pie that I've never seen duplicated. Perfect crust – full of cholesterol. Sweet custard, cooked just right. And raspberries, which had floated right on top of the custard, their tart flavor contrasting nicely with the sweet custard.

Not even Ukrops in all of its power, not even Wegmans in all of its glory, can recreate the deliciousness of my mother's raspberry custard pies!

Well, that's not true. My *dad* learned how to make them! From my mom. Before she died.

And so it happens, every once in a while, that when I go home to Pennsylvania, if the season is just right and dad's raspberry bushes have produced enough fruit, that we sit down to dinner. And when we are through, dad might place a slice of raspberry custard pie in front of me. And I take one bite. And *I taste my mother's love*. I taste her presence. With every bite of that pie, it's as if mom is there with us at the table.

What food does that for you?

I'll bet that many of you have a food like that. A food which, if you tasted it right now, would have the power to bring a loved one right into this moment. Maybe it's a food that your mom, or dad, or grandparent made, and you'd pay *anything* to taste it again. What food has the ability to carry someone's memory and presence for you?

Food can do that for human beings. When we eat a certain food, especially when we share that food with people we love on special occasions – food and drink have the ability to carry people's presence and memory.

Jesus understood that, because Jesus understood human beings better than anyone else. That is why, on the night before he died, he had supper with his friends. Jesus knew that he had to *leave* – he had to return to heaven, to his heavenly father. He had to go, but he also wanted to *stay*, with us, with the people that he loved.

So he gave them a command – 'eat my food, drink my drink, tell my story around the table. And when you do, I will be there. I will be there with you. I'll be there for you. I will be there to help you. When you eat my meal, I'll be there.'

The two disciples of Jesus in today's Gospel reading experience that same gift. The Gospel tells us that they were walking *away* from Jerusalem. They were probably going home. They had hoped that Jesus would be the new Messiah of Israel. But Jesus had died on the cross, and they put him in a tomb. Things did not turn out as they had hoped, or expected. These two disciples decided that everything was over, so they started to walk away. And they were very sad. Isn't that what happens to us when our hopes get dashed?

But as they walked, someone they did not recognize came along, and started to remind them of what Jesus had said, and what he had taught. This stranger started to remind them of Jesus' story.

Then, at supper time, the stranger started to do what Jesus had done at the Last Supper. He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to them, He gave them HIS food, the food he held in his hands at the last supper. The broken bread.

And then they realized – *he is here*. Jesus is here. This is no stranger at the table! Jesus is here, and they knew his presence through the food and drink that he gave us! In that food, at that table, on that night, the disciples understood that Jesus has not left us - he never leaves us! He is right here – as we gather around his table, and tell his story, and

share the food, the meal he gave us. He is always here.

When we do not know where else to find him – he is here, in the breaking of the bread.

When we do not know who will give us strength to face life's struggles – he is here, in the breaking of the bread.

When we do not know who will give us hope when we are sad – he is here, in the breaking of the bread.

When we do not know who will teach us how to love, forgive, and pray – he is here, in the breaking of the bread.

When we do not know who to turn to when a loved one passes away, when a friend hurts us, when doing the right thing is hard – he is here, in the breaking of the bread.

When we do not know who will teach us how to make a difference in our world, how to do what is just, how to make the lives of other people better – he is here, in the breaking of the bread.

When we do not know how to make sense out of a confusing world, when we don't know how to respond when so many people are angry and divisive, he is here, in the breaking of the bread.

For 2000 years, Christians have had an amazing encounter with Christ, *through food*. He told us to do this in memory of him. This is *his* special food, the food with which he has nourished every generation of Catholic Christians since the resurrection. And it teaches us to be grateful for every meal we share, every morsel we eat, every piece of bread, every mouthful, every slice of pie that God in his goodness sets before us and asks us to share.

Being a Christian isn't always easy, but there is one thing that is crystal clear – we always know where to find Jesus. He's right here, *in the breaking of the bread*.