

3rd Sunday of Easter, 2018
St. Mary's Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

I feel like I am standing on holy ground. Whenever I am asked to preach at a funeral, I meet with the family of the person who has died. I ask them to tell me stories about the deceased person's life. Then, the family members start telling the stories that only they know about their loved ones. It really is a privilege to hear all that. I feel like I am standing on holy ground.

Recently, I met with a family to plan a funeral for their mother. As they spoke about her life, her son said, "We should tell Father the Thanksgiving story." Every year, their mother – let's call her "Shirley" - told the story about the first time that she hosted the family's Thanksgiving meal. For decades, Shirley's *mother* was in charge of the feast. She cooked everything from scratch, and the food was always delicious.

Then came the year that Shirley hosted Thanksgiving for the first time. Shirley said that it was like a rite of passage, the official declaration that she was a woman. She had never really cooked a turkey before. She was nervous.

When Thanksgiving Day came, Shirley overcooked the turkey. No problem – the gravy will make it juicy. But when she looked into the sauce pan, the gravy had turned into something which looked like Elmer's glue. And when her young children tried to eat the cranberries, they spit them out. Turns out she had grabbed the wrong glass canister, and she had cooked the cranberries with about a pound of *salt*.

It was a Thanksgiving to remember! But her family said that Shirley always looked back on it with fondness, because she knew that something had changed: she had a family, and children. She was in charge of the feast. It was, she told her children each year, the day she really felt *grown up*.

I wonder if the disciples of the risen Lord had any of those same feelings during the encounter which we just heard from Luke's Gospel? This scene happens just after the disciples encounter the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus. They come to know him when he breaks bread with them. They run back to Jerusalem, and share the good news that Jesus is risen.

And it is just then, Luke tells us, that the risen Lord stands in their midst again. And what does he do? He greets them with the consoling words, "peace be with you." He reads their hearts, tells them not to be afraid. He begins to teach them that he is truly risen, just as he had promised. He loves them, cares for them, reassures them, just as he always had.

And then, in the middle of this amazingly loving scene, Jesus asks a remarkable ‘theological’ question: “Hey, you guys have anything to eat around here?” For generations, teenage sons have been quoting the Sacred Scriptures without knowing it, every time they say to their moms, “What do you have to eat?” Doesn’t that seem a little odd to you? Why would Jesus ask such a mundane question in the midst of this spiritually rich scene?

Well, maybe Jesus is trying to teach his disciples – and us – what Shirley learned all those years ago. Maybe this scene is a rite of passage for the first disciples of Jesus, and for *our* generation of disciples as well.

What do I mean? Well, up to this point in the Gospel of Luke, JESUS is the one who had done the feeding. He was the one who multiplied the loaves; he was the one who created a miracle with a few fish. Up to this point, *he* was the one who did the nurturing. Jesus did the teaching. Jesus did the caring. Jesus did the providing. Up to this point, the disciples were on the *receiving* end of Jesus’ goodness, sitting back while Jesus set the table and provided the feast.

But now...but now, the risen Christ stands before his disciples and says, “Hey, what do you have to eat?” Perhaps what Jesus is really saying is, “hey, how are *you* going to set the table? How are you going to nurture? How are you going to get to work?”

The followers of Jesus had been on the receiving end of God’s goodness for so long, but now, after the resurrection of Jesus, it becomes OUR job to grow up, to get to work. Yes, God will always generously bless us, and we need to always be grateful.

But, it is also our turn to do what Jesus did; to nurture as Jesus nurtured; to teach as Jesus taught; to work as Jesus worked. That’s what he says while he waits for his meal in the Gospel – he says, “repentance for the forgiveness of sins is to be preached to all the nations. And YOU are the witnesses to all of these things!” *You are the witnesses*. Are you ready to grow up, to get to work, and to do as Jesus has done for you?

In the past two weeks, I have been privileged to meet many people who are witnesses of Christ – people who understand that Jesus is calling them to do the work that he did, and to take their place in that long line of Christians who have made a difference in our world. I met a man who is helping to build a clean water system in Haiti, so that adults and children there can have reliable access to something I take for granted – a glass of water.

I met a woman who has dedicated her life to teaching autistic children. She was on the fast track to make a lot of money in the business world, but she felt a call to minister to the suffering Jesus she sees in struggling kids.

I met two young parents who told me how they never put their children to bed without saying a prayer with them and making the sign of the cross on their foreheads. Why? Because they remembered the promise they made on the day of their children's baptisms – that they would introduce their children to Jesus Christ.

I met a college student is taking a brave stand on her campus against the pervasive culture of alcohol abuse and meaningless hook ups.

I've met the witnesses of Jesus the past few weeks. I met an elected official who consistently stands for the rights of the unborn. I met a young adult who put off plan to go to graduate school in order to work with refugee families. I was with a couple who have faithfully lived the sacrament of marriage for 41 years. I watched a husband tenderly caring for his very sick wife.

The family who met with me to plan a funeral said that Shirley always remembered that Thanksgiving, because it was the day when she became the one who made the meal, and set the table, and provided the feast. Well....the world is very hungry....your neighbors need to be nourished in so many ways. And Jesus asks you today: "What do YOU have to eat? Will you share it?"

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