

3rd Sunday of Easter & First Communion
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

We called it a ‘spaghetti sandwich.’

When I was in the 2nd grade at Ringing Rocks School in Pennsylvania, I loved the food we had for lunch each day in the cafeteria! I loved the pizza on Fridays, the tater tots with extra ketchup on Wednesdays.

And, every other Tuesday, we had what I called a ‘spaghetti sandwich.’ Every other Tuesday, the lunch ladies served us a plate of canned spaghetti, some milk, and a Kaiser roll.

Then, we took half of our Kaiser roll, put some spaghetti on it, folded it over, and ate it like a sandwich. Delicious!

In 2nd grade, my best friend was named Bobby. He sat right across from me at lunch. And I noticed that every time we had spaghetti sandwiches for lunch, Bobby’s Italian mother packed his lunch that day. I later found out that she did not want her son to eat what she called “fake American pasta.”

So Bobby’s mom sent him to school with a lunch bag the size of carry-on luggage! Inside was a hoagie the size of Sicily – with prosciutto, mortadella, ‘gabbagool,’ provolone, a ton of garlic.

And, for dessert, Bobby’s mom always made TWO homemade cupcakes...

One day, Bobby said to me: “I’ll trade you.” He said, “you give me half of your spaghetti sandwich, and I’ll give you a cupcake.” I took the deal!

And every other Tuesday, I gave Bobby half of my spaghetti, and he gave me a homemade cupcake. All through 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade...

But in 5th grade, it stopped. Because, one day, Bobby was made captain of a kickball team, and the teacher told him to start choosing his team. I was his best friend. I thought Bobby would pick me. But he didn’t. I just kept standing there. I ended up on to the other team.

Bobby had hurt my feelings. I was so mad. He made me feel left out. And I said some very mean things to him. So for several days, we did not speak to each other. I was so angry and hurt.

The following Tuesday was 'spaghetti sandwich' day. I was still mad at Bobby, so I didn't say anything to him when he sat down across from me at lunch. And then, Bobby took out his cupcakes. And, without saying anything, he put one cupcake on my tray, just like he always did.

And I took half of my spaghetti sandwich, and I put it on his tray. Just like always.

I took a bite of the cupcake. He took a bite of the spaghetti. And as soon as we tasted that food, it reminded us that we had been friends a very long time. And by the end of lunch we had forgiven each other.

When we shared that food, it reminded us that we shared a friendship. And friends are always there for each other. Friends forgive each other. We love each other.

I thought about the spaghetti sandwiches because of the story that we hear in today's Gospel reading. At first, this sounds like a simple story about eating breakfast. The followers of Jesus were fishing, and after a long night on the lake, they meet Jesus on the shore and he made breakfast for them.

But this is not just a simple breakfast story. As you hear today's Gospel, you have to remember that all of this is happening AFTER Jesus was arrested, after he was put on trial, after he was crucified and buried. AFTER he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday.

And the important thing to know is this: when Jesus was being arrested, and put on trial; when he was suffering and dying – most of his best friends let him down. They disappointed him. Just when Jesus needed his best friends the most, they ran away, or hid. Maybe they were afraid or sad. But they abandoned Jesus at the hardest moment of his life.

So, when the disciples see the Risen Jesus standing on the shoreline that morning, I wonder if any of them said to themselves, "I'll bet he's angry with us for abandoning him." I wonder if any of them were worried that Jesus would be mad at them, or that he wouldn't talk to them. Remember, they had let him down. Jesus had every right to be angry.

But, apparently, Jesus is not in the anger business. He is in the forgiveness business. Peter jumps out of the boat and swims toward Jesus. And the others row the boat to shore.

And there, on the beach, they see that Jesus has prepared some food. Jesus does NOT say, "I'm mad at you!" Instead, he says, "Come and eat." And as they ate, they were reminded that Jesus was their best friend. Jesus had taught them so much. As they ate, the food reminded them of all that they had shared with Jesus. The food proved to them that Jesus loved them.

The Gospel says that He took the bread in his hands. And the bread became the promise of his love, and his forgiveness.

And the great news is – Jesus *still* takes bread into his hands, and that bread *still* becomes the promise of his love, and his forgiveness.

Today, we are thrilled because so many of our parish children will receive Holy Communion for the first time. The Eucharist is the celebration of the fact that Jesus always loves us, and always forgives us.

Jesus took bread into his hands at the last supper, and he said to his friends, ‘Take and eat it. This is my body.’ He took the cup and said, “drink this in memory of me. It’s my blood.” And a few days later, on the beach by the lake, Jesus took bread into his hands again, and his friends knew that Jesus was with them, and that he loved them.

Every time we gather for the Eucharist, Jesus breaks the bread again, and pours the cup. From the day of our first communion, to the day of our last communion, we know that, in the Eucharist, we can always come back to Jesus. In the Eucharist, we always know that he is here. If we have let him down, he is here to forgive us. If we are confused, he is here to guide us. If we are sad, he is here to comfort us.

When we eat this bread, given to us by Jesus, we know that he is here. And all is forgiven. And we are loved.

When we eat this bread, given to us by Jesus, he teaches us how to love and forgive and help each other.

When we eat this bread, we know that Jesus is really present *here*, and he asks us to live his Gospel *out there*, where feelings get hurt, and life gets hard, and people feel left out because they were not picked for the team.

Today, these young people eat the sacramental meal which reminds us that our best friend is Jesus. He always is. Always will be. Isn’t it wonderful to have a friend like Jesus, who is always ready to share such amazing food?