

A Word on Wednesday from Pastor Tonia

"La Gioia della Tavola - The Joy of the Table" 11/2/22

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is my body given for you." Then He took the cup and proclaimed it to be the new covenant in His blood, shed for us. (1 Cor 11:23-26)

After serving the bread and the wine, Jesus tells us to eat and to drink in remembrance of Him, of His life, death, and resurrection. We are to celebrate this meal, again and again, never forgetting *La Gioia Della Tavola*, the Joy of the Table.

On my recent tour of Italy, I was blessed to be introduced to the joy of the table – Italian style. Living alone my meals are quiet and solitary, so sitting at a table of 12 was a shock to my system. I just hoped I'd remember to use a fork and not my fingers.

Night after night 12 strangers gather around a table, there is clatter and chatter, unfamiliar aromas and different flavors, eyes opened to another's world. Laughing as you eat, sharing the joy of the table. Overwhelming for one who usually dines alone.

Strangers become friends, sharing stories which melt your heart, lift your spirits, widen your horizons. Being with others as new tastes break open on your tongue. Unexpected joy.

The plates arrive, each a work of art, the chef's pride, the server's excitement to describe the dish, anxious to see our enjoyment. The groans with the first bite. The moans, then the dish and the fork are whisked away, and we'd finish another glass of wine. Then a new fork arrives, and we knew there's more. A metaphor for life - a new fork promising more to come, the promise of a new adventure. One course follows another, more clatter and chatter.

Over the meal, as one fork leads to another dish, one finds them self-opening up to the person across the table. One realizes as they listen, everyone has faced their own struggles, overcome their personal worsts, fought for their dreams, loved, and lost, accomplished goals, and found life on new journeys, opening their minds and their hearts to new people and places. Each person has had a plate whisked away, - and - has received a new fork.

The stories. Falling in love at the Dog Pound, receiving new hearts, literally, a wink which led to love, the miracles of modern medicine, diseases beaten, second chances, days of doubts, stoically forging a future, and laugh till you cry memories of meals long ago.

Being hit over the head with joy. The joy of being with others, hearing their life's stories, learning from their experiences, being overcome with compassion and empathy, and realizing who you are by coming to know who they are. Realizing self is not the centerpiece at this table. Each story adds to ours to make a complete altar on which sits the bread and the wine, the body and blood. The lives of others bring to us the joy of the table.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus was resolute, this is why He had come. Jesus feeds those who have been by His side, those who have heard Him teach, watched Him heal, raise the dead, create from nothing. We who have heard the story, long to be fed with His body and blood, to be strengthened by the food we receive from His hands.

During His last meal – Jesus fed His followers physical and spiritual sustenance for the journey. Did His followers share memories of the past, as well as concern for the future, or were they so bewildered they sat in stunned silence? Did they know they would receive a new fork?

As the last supper is re-enacted during the Eucharist, as the Pastor repeats the words Christ spoke over the bread and the wine, there is the foretelling of sacrifice and death, the promise of a new fork, and the life-giving joy of the table.

As we come to the table, we find Christ is present, present in the gifts of Word and Sacrament. Here we are fed the Word of God and eat the bread and drink the wine so we will never be hungry again. This is the meal which upholds us and sustains us on our journey. Each time we partake of this meal we receive a new fork, and we experience the joy of the table

Please pray with me.

God of the journey, thank You for traveling with us, for guiding us, protecting us, loving us, and feeding us. Thank You for calling us to Your banqueting table, where You feed us the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Your Son. Thank You for new forks. May we hunger for Your Word and for this meal. Help us to see and accept the joy of the table.

Amen.