



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"We Are When We Eat"**
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Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Epistle 1 Corinthians 8:1b-13
Gospel Mark 1:21-28

In the world of religious orders, both in the Roman Catholic Church and in our own, each group is known for what it does best. The Franciscans are known for being pastoral. The Dominicans are known for being scholarly, and the Benedictines are known for their worship and spirituality. These "specialties" are known as "charisms" or special gifts of God's Holy Spirit to accomplish a specific goal or purpose.

I have now decided that our "charism" is food. I say that without irony because it's pretty clear that food is what we do well and what we share best. It is the "cement" that keeps us together socially: pot luck lunches and (soon) suppers, "yam cha" Chinese breakfasts once a month after the early service, and (at the very least) our coffee hour that tempts people to linger a while for talk over a hot cup of adult beverage. At the Church of the Holy Trinity, it seems to be the case that we fulfill our calling best when we gather and share: "we are *when* we eat."

I am not just saying that we eat a lot as a group (although some of us eat a lot as individuals.) By naming our shared meals as our "charism", I am saying that God has raised up this particular feature of our parish at this time for a particular purpose: to

bring us together and to strength the bond of love and friendship that our mealtimes represent.

It's all very natural. Food answers several basic human needs: it provides basic nourishment, it reinforces social relationships, and it reminds us of our dependence on others. In particular, for Christians, this dependence is first and foremost on God Himself.

In today's epistle reading from Paul's first letter to his friends in Corinth, he, too, is concerned about food and what it represents. Unlike those in Jewish Jerusalem, people who wished to eat meat in a Greek city could be relatively sure that the animal involved had been slaughtered as part of the pagan rites at a local temple. Paul is fully aware that the new life in Christ means that Christians didn't have to be worried about the false gods of the old religion, but in those early days of the Church's life, some would still be scandalized if they saw Christians sharing this "unholy communion" with the pagan idols. Paul's advice is practical to the local situation: "...If food is a cause of [a brother's] falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall."

Paul also quotes something in this passage that I'm sure he would later regret: he writes, "Food will not bring us close to God." Of course, he is talking about this issue of temple meat, not the fellowship of Christian 'agape' meals shared together in the spirit of love, nor, especially, about the Eucharist for which Paul had the highest regard. Later in the same letter, Paul goes "ballistic" over those who abused the sacred nature of the communal "potluck" meals of the early Church that were the original context of the celebration of Holy Communion. Mostly, Paul is concerned about the unity of the Christian community and the possibility of offending those new or still weak to the faith. Unity is Paul's primary goal for his new churches. And unity ought to be ours, too. What a wonderful opportunity to prove it when we share hospitality.

Our "charism", our special gift, is not just food, but the life in Christ that food can represent. Our Anglican tradition holds onto the central witness of the early Church

in its sacramental life. Sacraments are the ways that God uses the material world to touch us spiritually. The primary sacrament is Christ Himself: God-made-Man in Jesus. We also experience the sacramental presence of Christ in the teachings of our faith, recorded in Scripture and illustrated in the lives of Christian men and women of our own and of earlier times. And finally, in the rite that we gather for every Sunday, Christ feeds us with His own body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion. From this holy meal, all our other sharings of food- our coffee hours, our potlucks and our dim sum can reflect God's presence, too. For the Christian, the whole world is potentially a sacramental sharing of God's presence, God's love and God's care.

If indeed food is our "charism", then let's rejoice in it by sharing food and drink together as often as we practically can, and by inviting others to share, too. But if we share food, then we must be prepared to share our faith as well- showing those who come to us that our hospitality is but a pale reflection of the love God offers the world in that primary sacrament our Lord Jesus Christ.