

**Third Sunday of Easter – Year C
(Apr. 14, 2013)**

Food and Love

Have you ever thought about the connection between food and love? There is one, you know, even though it might not occur to us to think about it very often. Just consider Valentine's Day when all those heart-shaped red boxes suddenly appear. They are supposed to say we love someone even though the food inside isn't the healthiest in the world.

And what do we do when we want to entertain that special person in our lives. We invite them to dinner. We put out our best china and silverware and take special care in preparing the meal. Or we invite them to a nice restaurant where we spend a little more than we might ordinarily. Why? To let them know that they are our friends. That they are special! Even that we love them.

Jesus knew this. What do we see him doing more than anything else with his disciples and friends? Sitting down to a meal. He even used the image of a banquet to describe what we will be doing in heaven. You've heard of the heavenly banquet where there will be good food and fine wines – or whatever your favorite dinner beverage is. Think too of those times he fed so many hungry people. We are told that when he saw them his heart went out to them and so he made sure they had food to eat. That's how he showed his love.

And of course there is the Last Supper. John in his gospel tells us that Jesus, having loved his own, he loved them to the end – and then begins John's version of the Last Supper. We know that at that meal Jesus took bread and wine – food and drink – and gave it to them as his body and blood. Why? Because he loved them and even though he was going to leave them, he wanted some way to continue to be present to them and to be present most intimately. What better way than in the form of bread and wine which we assimilate. They become part of us just like any other food but this is not just any other food. It is the body and blood of Jesus united to us in the most intimate way possible. Only God could have thought of it.

And then there is the Gospel story you just heard. Jesus appears to

the disciples at the lake shore after they have been out fishing and have caught nothing. He tells them to cast their nets on the right side for a catch of fish. At first only one of them recognizes him, the disciple Jesus loved – and that’s important. They bring a huge catch of fish to the shore and what do they find? Jesus is making breakfast! There is bread on the fire – morning toast. And Jesus takes some of the fish they have caught and cooks them for the disciples. Food and love!

After they have had their fill he takes Peter aside and asks him, “Do you love me?” And we know how Peter answers. Three times Jesus asks the question and three times Peter repeats, “Lord you know all things. You know that I love you.” And what does he tell Peter to do? Feed my lambs; feed my sheep. Feed them. Again: food. And do it, Peter, because you love me; because I love you and because now you must love all these I am giving into your care. And you will do it, Peter by feeding them. Again, food and love!

It’s a wonderful scene, full of special meaning for all of us. Particularly today, of course, as we welcome eight young members of our community to the table of the Lord. For the first time these eight will approach the altar and receive the bread and wine that have become the Body and Blood of Jesus. You understand, I am sure, that Jesus invites you to receive this food because he loves you. And he wants you to love him back.

Today is a special day for you. Indeed it is a special day for all of us because we are all very happy for you. We pray that you will always be as close to Jesus as you are today, that you will come to understand how much he loves you, and that you will always love him back. Congratulations to you and God bless you all.