ST. ALOYSIUS NOVENA OF GRACE 2023

Bread and Flour: The Bread of Life

Materials at hand : A slice of bread and a small amount of flour. A candle as a prayer focus.

CENTERING (Suggested opening prayer— or your own) : (Light the candle and say with your hands spread open:)

Loving God, Creator of all that is, here I am – today, in this place,

with all the senses You have given me. Help me to use them to experience You more deeply.

You are present everywhere around me; open me to know more of the many ways

that Your goodness surrounds me. Thank you for this time to be with You and to listen to You.

Amen.

SAVORING (Senses at Work):

Take a look at the slice of bread, which once was primarily flour, like the small amount near it. Even before the flour went through the process of becoming bread, it first had to be ground from wheat. First, sniff and then run your fingers through the flour, a powder that looks fairly lifeless, but which we know can help sustain life and is sometimes even called the “staff of life.”

In order to become the slice of bread, this flour then was mixed with other ingredients, including yeast, then kneaded and allowed to rise before being baked. Touch the slice of bread and notice its soft texture and the fine holes indicating that the yeast has done its job in making the bread lighter by trapping carbon dioxide in the dough. Smell the rich result of that baking and imagine the warm, rich smell as it first came from the oven. Think of all the hands and effort that helped bring this slice of bread to your home and table.

Taste some of the slice of bread, noticing the rich combination of tastes — a bit of sweetness as well as the salt, yeast and flour **.**

LISTENING (The Word of God):

Listen to one or more of these passages as you watch the candle play across the flour and the rest of the slice of bread:

[Mat 13:33] He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.

[Mat 26:26] While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."

[John 6:35] Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

[Luke 24:30-32] When he was at the table with [two disciples from Emmaus], he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

CONSIDERING (Time to Reflect):

Bread, of one form or another, seems to have been important to the human community since prehistoric times. Today, whether it's bagels or flatbread, pasta or pocket bread, matzoh or baguettes, sandwiches or tortillas, bread satisfies much of the hunger of people throughout the world every day. Breaking bread together is an important part of any act of hospitality. We even get our word "companion" from the one who breaks or shares bread ("pane") with ("cum") us.

We can lose sight of the gift of bread and the act of baking it when we can so easily go to the supermarket and get a loaf of bread. But for much of the world today and for most of human history bread was something precious, to be both made and shared in the home.

The Jewish festival of Passover is also called the feast of Unleavened Bread because the Jews couldn't wait for their bread to rise in their haste to escape the Pharaoh in Egypt and so had to eat their bread unleavened, on the run. The Christian Eucharist began at such a Passover meal, and early Christians met in one another's homes for the "breaking of the bread **,"** as the Eucharist was first known.

To eat — or share — bread is indeed an important human and spiritual activity.

RESPONDING (So what?):

In Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth, he talks about the implications of sharing bread: [1 Cor 10:17] "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

And the book of Proverbs reminds us, [Prov 22:9] "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor."

Is there someone I know who would like some bread or — perhaps even more— like a chance to "share bread" with me? Perhaps it's a lonely neighbor or a friend whom I haven't talked to in a while. Can I find time to have lunch — or even coffee with that person?

Or maybe I can donate to, or get involved with, an organization like Bread for the World, seeking justice for the world's hungry people through lobbying.

Bread baker God, help me to see what a gift my daily bread is — whether sandwich, toast or donut— and to share with others what You have so generously shared with me. Amen.

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