

Josephine Guerra-Odle

Josephine's passion was cooking - all aspects of it. She waited tables, bartended, cooked, arranged banquets, and opened restaurants. She enjoyed eating and loved getting you to eat, especially her tamales. Participating in a cursillo strengthened her faith, and her devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe was a signature devotion for her. Jesus' mother Mary had gone through her struggles while devoting herself to family life, feeding her son and having him provide wine at the wedding in Cana. Mary proved an inspiration for Josephine, whose passion for cooking spilled into great love for her family.

Families never turn out the way people imagine they will, and Josephine channeled her love and passion in ways that brought her the remarkable children who enriched her life and the lives of others. They have all known strong emotion - the joys of love and the pangs of loss, the stirrings of hope and the dangers of despair. But through it all, they have kept close to the values that build a society - the primacy of family and faith in God. They reaffirm these values from day to day and from meal to meal.

The meal is one of the most provocative images in the bible, and today we hear proclaimed two important passages that pertain to food. Isaiah looks over a group of people disillusioned by the circumstances they face in family, faith, leadership and society. They have gathered on a mountain where they hope to encounter the promise of God once again. He promises them that the Lord will provide for his people "on this mountain." They won't have to go far. God will provide food and drink in abundance so that those who are fearful of their future will take heart. Isaiah says that on this mountain the Lord will go beyond their physical needs; he "will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all the nations." What is that veil? What is that web? Death. The Lord "will destroy death forever," Isaiah proclaims.

The full meaning of that prophecy came to light in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In the midst of his ministry, according to Saint John, Jesus gave his most important teaching concerning food and drink. He called himself the living bread. "Whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world." Calling his flesh true food and his blood true drink, Jesus promised to remain with those who fed on him. His cross, which we commemorate in each eucharistic meal, destroys death forever.

The effort it takes to prepare a meal is truly a gift of the self. Just as Jesus offered his life for us on the altar of the cross, so many of our parents have offered their lives for us on the altar of the kitchen. Throughout the whole process, cooks not only think about ingredients; they meditate on the people who will eat the meal. Good meal preparation means sacrificing oneself, one's time and one's talent, in order to bring life and nourishment to someone else, to give them an opportunity for joy, companionship and satisfaction.

As we bid goodbye to Josephine today, we thank God for her life, and for the life she gave to others. We pray that God will look upon her today with favor and offer her a meal more abundant than she has ever conceived, a meal of grace and virtue, rest and peace.

Thursday, November 8, 2018