

**Fr. Tim Clancy**  
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### Finding God by Service of Neighbor

One thing we can say about the historical Jesus: He loved a party. We often find him at banquets and wedding feasts, or being invited into someone's home for supper, or even him inviting himself over to someone's house for dinner. There is no record of him having ever turned down an invite either—whether from the great or the small, the rich or the poor, from a sinner or a saint, he happily ate with anyone and everyone. Others may have been scandalized at some of the people he would break bread with, but this is what Jesus meant by humility—connecting with everyone.

Now, sharing a meal is an intimate act of connection—taking into yourself what someone has cooked and prepared for you. For the host and cook, it's a act of care and generosity. Care because it takes time and effort, generosity, because food is not free. For the guest it's an act of trust and acceptance. Trust that the food is going to taste ok, acceptance that the time spent will be worth it. For both then it's a form of recognition.

I have a habit of asking my students at one point or another during the semester how many had a custom of eating meals together as a family and how strictly it was observed. Even with the microwave and the pervasiveness of fast food, most of them say they were raised with family meals and that it was important to be there. It's often only when kids leave home, that eating with those close to us begins to fall away.

I love to tell the story about a Jesuit I know who did his philosophy studies in Mexico. For his apostolic work while at school, he would volunteer in a very poor parish, which in Mexico, means dirt poor, sometimes in the sense of a dirt floor. He wanted to start a bible study group but he was having no success. People were just not interested. But they would invite him to their homes for a dinner of beans and tortillas. His brother friends would kid him that his ministry was "eating the food of the poor." But my friend came to see that this was exactly what his ministry was—to connect with the poor by eating with them. To honor them by sharing a meal with them, cooked by them. In so doing he would move from being a guest to being a member of the family. The Italians have a saying: "Mi casa est sou casa"—"my home is your home."

We gather here every week to share a meal together. For after Jesus' death his disciples could think of no better way to keep the movement alive, than to re-enact his last supper with them. And today we conclude our sacred meal with another sacred meal, our annual Parish picnic, the quintessential American meal in which we celebrate our life together as a community, as God's church. And who are we who gather? Hosts or guests? Well, both. For it is a potluck,

another thing quintessential to American life.

Its true for our parish too. We are all the invited and the inviters. For each of us receives from the rest of us, things that we need for our faith to flourish. We can, each one of us, identify with those to whom Jesus reaches out, for healing from our wounds, for forgiveness for having wounded others, for consolation in our sorrow, for encouragement in our struggles.

And each one of us has something to offer to the rest of us. Each one of us has gifts as well as needs, we each have something to contribute, to enrich the lives of the rest of us, to build up our parish community. And so while I am up here where you all can see me and you are down there where I can see all of you , there is no seating order in the pews. There is no grown-up table and kiddie table. We all eat together for we are all Christians together. For it is only together that we make up the Body of Christ. So let=s party!