

Eating Your Liturgy

By: Andrew Casad

With Thanksgiving approaching, it is right to give God thanks and praise. The Eucharist we celebrate every Sunday is the Christian Thanksgiving—*ευχαριστω* being the Greek verb ‘to offer thanks.’ Every time we celebrate the Eucharist we echo God’s announcement in Genesis that creation is good! From that same account of Genesis we know that God also created time, making all creation to experience the natural rhythms of days, weeks, months, and years. Yet many of us treat all time the same, working ourselves into the ground day and night, then treating Sunday as a day for leisure, rather than as a sabbath to delight in the goodness of creation. We likewise insist that every season of the year offer us the same food as every other rather than savoring the fruits of each distinct season, further distancing ourselves from the rhythms God made to show forth his glory. But the wisdom of the Liturgy of the Hours reminds us that we sanctify different times of each day in different ways: Morning Prayer awakens us to open our lips and proclaim God’s praise while Night Prayer invites God to guard us as we sleep. And in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we sanctify the week, beginning with Sunday standing at the head as *Dies Domini*, the Day of the Lord, which is made holy (or simply set apart) for God. And within each year, we sanctify the seasons: Lent and Easter could not be more different from one another and yet both are necessary in God’s plan of salvation.

As we look ahead to Thanksgiving—a time when families will gather together around the table to offer praise and thanks to God—and the beginning of a new liturgical year on the First Sunday of Advent (December 1), I would like to offer some ways that we can bring the liturgy home to our dinner tables. One of the most powerful ways to get into the seasons and so to celebrate the rhythms of time created by God is to celebrate at home what we celebrate in the Church. By making our dinner table menus a celebration of creation all year round, not just at Thanksgiving, we can delight in God’s goodness and abundance with which he surrounds us at each season. Especially for holydays you can make a commitment to preparing foods particular to that season, serving food that is in season and available locally. Eating with the seasons becomes not only a way to bring home the life of the Church but also is a statement of your commitment to be good stewards of God’s creation. Catholic teaching finds fulfillment at

our tables when we become aware of the rich blessings which earth has given and human hands have made. We become aware of our connection to the land that allows us to have life in abundance as we come to reflect on the practices used to cultivate the earth, the treatment of animals we rely on for food, and the labor of men and women who produce our food and with whom we are called to stand in solidarity. All of this reminds us, in the words of the [National Catholic Rural Life Conference](#), that Eating is a Moral Act.

As attested to by the popularity of a number of recent books, such as Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, we are in an age where once again we are beginning to understand the connections between our most fundamental of choices—what we eat—and the most basic statements of who we are—what we believe. And, if what we believe is that the same God who created everything to announce his glory also became incarnate to redeem creation and unite it to himself, ought we not to devote ourselves to caring for the land which sustains us? This then is another way in which we can make our tables at home a reflection of our celebration at the table of Eucharist. One of the primary means we have to bring forth a harvest of justice is to support a local agricultural economy, which also helps us to eat in season. When we are invested in a particular area, such as having children in a particular school district, and when we know those who are responsible for those things we buy, such as a tailor who makes clothing to suit us, we are much more likely to be responsible to these communities. The same is true with our food: if we support local farmers and get to know them by visiting their farms and shopping at farmers' markets, we become part of their communities and, in turn, root ourselves in the land. Not only does this benefit the community and heighten our ability to delight in God's creation, but also allows us to support systems that are sustainable and less reliant on petroleum to both grow and transport our food the 2,000 miles that has become average.

And so this Advent season, I would encourage you to *eat your liturgy*: find out what is grown here locally. Use localharvest.org to find a farmers' market close to where you live. Find recipes that coincide with these local products and have your family help you in preparing them. Tell stories related to the liturgical life of the Church and share Advent prayers of expectation, longing for the fulfillment of God's promise to visit his people and bring light into the middle of our darkest season. As you do so, you will

be eating your liturgy. And just as we come to associate particular musical settings of the Mass, colors of vestments and decorations, and the use of incense with particular liturgical seasons, we will also begin to associate these local and seasonal foods with the rhythms of our Church life—the rhythms of God’s good creation. Soon the smell of plum pudding will become associated with the beginning of Advent (December 1) and eating Pan de Muerto on All Souls’ Day (November 2) will be your family’s way to remember all those who have died. Ultimately your kitchen and dining room table will become an extension of the Eucharistic banquet we share every Sunday!

Works Consulted:

Holy Cows and Hog Heaven: The Food Buyer’s Guide to Farm Friendly Food by Joel Salatin (Polface, 2005).

The Omnivore’s Dilemma by Michael Pollan (Penguin, 2007).

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver (HarperCollins, 2007).

Cooking for Christ: Your Kitchen Prayer Book by Florence P. Berger (National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 1949).

How to Make Your House a Home: Family Liturgy and Religious Practices by Bernard Stokes OFM. (National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 1955).

[Eating in Sync with the Seasons](#) by Joel Salatin.

[A Time to Plant: Life Lessons in Work, Prayer, and Dirt](#) by Kyle Kramer (Sorin, 2011).

[Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating](#) by Norman Wirzba (Cambridge, 2010)