

Unconventional Communion

Our church served Communion this past Sunday, and the servers this time weren't the ministers on the church staff, or the elders, or the Church Board. They were members of a group that comes every Sunday from a facility that is helping them stay sober and out of trouble. It was unconventional. And beautiful.

As I stood in line, waiting my turn to receive elements that connect me to a meal served thousands of years ago, I remembered another unconventional scene when I was in Washington D.C. with several students. I was there for a journalism conference, and the site was near Dupont Circle, long before it became a trendy hotspot for young professionals. Back then it was filled with homeless people, drug dealers and cops.

The students and I went to dinner at a Chinese restaurant where the cook piled way too much food into the Styrofoam platters. We had a fun meal together, and none of us could finish what we had ordered. We didn't want to take the containers back to the hotel. Our rooms didn't have refrigerators, and we were leaving the next morning anyway.

When it was clear that we were not going to eat any more, one of the students gathered up the containers and closed them. I assumed she was being a servant-type and was going to throw them away. She must have good parents, I thought to myself. I'll tell them that they trained her well. She got some plastic bags and utensils from an employee without our noticing. Then we headed back to the hotel.

By the time we got to Dupont Circle, it was very dark. And much, much more

crowded. My parental instincts kicked in and I made sure I could see each student. Then I saw the one who had cleared our table approach some of the locals and hand them containers of food. They gathered around her and she patiently distributed the elements. It was over in minutes.

The rest of us stood in awe as we witnessed this act. Out of our excess, she provided some grace and mercy and relief. I had been a little fearful because

when he had his first Communion experience in church, he wondered what changes would occur when he took the wafer and cup. "Would I be a Superman, a holy man, a healer? Would homework now be easier? Would I be a wiz? Or would I be jailed in piety, condemned to sinlessness, obedience and no fun?"

What he discovered was, "I was still me; there would be no howls of objection, no immediate correction or condemnation, no hint that I was under



just hungry

we were among hungry strangers. She saw it differently. Give us this day our daily bread, some of them might have prayed.

What she did stuck with me. A week ago while I was sitting at a window table in a restaurant in San Diego, I watched as a young couple sat on a bench outside the restaurant. They appeared to be living on the street. They had a torn piece of cardboard, and I watched them write something on it. Then they turned the cardboard around and set it in front of them on the sidewalk.

It said: "Just hungry."

I asked the waiter for a container and utensils for the food I couldn't finish. When I left the restaurant and gave it to the couple, they looked like they could devour the meal in seconds. They were the age of my own adult kids. Or former students.

The writer Ron Hansen said in his book "A Stay Against Confusion" that

new management, just the calming sense that whoever I was was fine with Jesus. It was a grace I hadn't imagined."

No magic. Just a Presence and Acceptance for a person hungry for presence and acceptance.

I wondered what we all looked like at church last Sunday as we approached the guy holding the elements. What did he see?

My guess is that he saw us the same way he saw himself—standing with a sign written to God that said, "Just hungry."



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