

Grace Notes from the System Chaplain

Grace Notes May 2018

Over the last couple of weeks we have seen some very obvious signs of the emerging Spring season. Last week I had to brush snow off my car one morning and the next day went looking for ice cream in the afternoon because it was so warm: only in Canada, eh?

Although one can buy ice cream in the supermarket all year round and serve it for dessert, there is something very special about going to the ice cream 'parlour' to choose a treat and then sit – often outside – and enjoy it. This brings back memories of many special ice cream experiences from my past, with many people and in many places. So I suppose I could call ice cream one of my comfort foods.

Comfort foods: why are they so labelled? Perhaps because they remind us of times we felt secure or happy or were surrounded by people we loved in a place where we felt truly at home. They involve our senses: the smell of bread baking, onions frying, apples turning into a pie; the sensation of biting into a warm cookie and having the melting chocolate chips coat your tongue; the sight of the casserole dish of beautifully browned scalloped potatoes being carried to the table; the sizzle of meat or poultry roasting in the oven, or hamburgers on the barbecue; a song, special grace or even a phrase. Any one of these things can conjure up a memory of a person, a place, a time which was very special. Our senses help us to remember – to re-member, to bring the memory back to life.

We have faith practices which similarly help us to remember, in many cases to bring to life an event at which we were not present but for which the story is very real. In our Roman Catholic Eucharistic Liturgy, as in many Christian traditions, we have the *Anamnesis* or Memorial Acclamation which recalls for us God's saving action through Jesus Christ. If we really pay attention to these words and allow them to soak into us, we are in the presence of Jesus as he shares the bread and wine with his friends at the last supper.

Our faith tradition is very rich in appeals to the senses. There are the things we may smell in church: beeswax from the Easter candle, the balsam in Holy Chrism, incense, lilies, the metal polish used for brass furnishings and vessels, (if our church is old enough, the furniture polish used on the pews). There are the words of the Mass or other liturgy which are familiar to the ear, the music of ritual, hymns, songs and organ music, bells (and for those who can remember, the wooden clappers used on Good Friday). There is the beauty of stained glass, the visual presentation of the sanctuary with spotless linens, gleaming brass and flickering candles. Think of the taste of the Host on your tongue, the sharp sip of communion wine, the coolness of water on your skin as you bless yourself or receive it from a sprinkling, the warmth of oil as you were anointed with Chrism or the Oil of the Sick. Have you ever walked into a strange church and felt at home right away? What was it that created the feeling of comfort? I suggest it was the familiarity of some of the things listed or others very similar which re-membered in you the good feelings you have had at a former time.

If you are fortunate enough to enjoy all of your senses, imagine what it would be like to have to function without one or more of them. Or if one of your senses was a source of pain: that light hurt your eyes, or sound hurt your ears, or even a gentle touch on your skin caused you great pain.

Consider these words of the psalmist:

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,

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when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.

In your book were written

all the days that were formed for me,

when none of them as yet existed. (Psalm 139:14-16 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV))

We're reminded that God loves us as we are, as we were created, and not as we think we ought to be – or would like to be. Human beings are far more fickle and less accepting than the God in whose image and likeness they are created! From my days as a Religious Education consultant, I have fond memories of singing with confirmation candidates on retreat these words by liturgical musician David Light: "May you be real, be free, be worthy of me. Be yourself because you are the person I love."

Last month we enjoyed a working group facilitated by Jeremy Staples in which lay parish workers, pastoral animators, chaplains, administrators and parents came together to discuss how we can enhance our bonds and cooperation among home, school and parish. This was a very fruitful session which we hope to be the first of many. When we talk about the Body of Christ, it is important to be cognizant of its need to be nourished as a whole body just as any body requires. If our workouts focus on one part of our body at the expense of the others, we start running into problems. Jesus taught us to love in an encompassing way that calls us to work together; how fortunate we are as the HCDSB community to be able to do this in so many ways.

By now you may have had the opportunity to dip into the Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education, "Renewing the Promise" issued by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario and distributed by the Institute for Catholic Education. It reminds us of the pastoral letter, "This Moment of Promise", issued in 1989 in response to the extension of funding for our Catholic secondary schools. In the words of the document:

"Three decades later, our context may have changed profoundly, but our mission has not; Catholic schools are places where children and young people may find solid and enduring values to give hope to, meaning and purpose to life through an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship, and the certain knowledge of God's unwavering love for us, provides a firm place to stand in shifting times."¹

We've seen some wonderful momentum develop from our Theological Theme this year; let's make sure that we keep building on our love relationship with the Lord and respond to the challenge to 'Renew the Promise'.

The last of our Adult Faith Formation sessions is coming up on Wednesday, May 30th at Fionn MacCool's Irish pub, 2331 Appleby Line in Burlington. Father Wayne Lobsinger, known already to us as a gifted and inspiring facilitator, will speak on the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and lead us in discussion. Bring a friend and come to share as you enjoy your favourite libation. Finger foods will be provided. Non-HCDSB participants are most welcome: we just ask them to register at celticyes@gmail.com to be sure we have enough food!

With every blessing,

Gillian

¹ Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education, ©2018, Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario