

Last Sunday of Epiphany
February 11, 2018

Double Share

The Midtown neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York is a predominantly Orthodox Jewish neighborhood off New York City's usual tourist path. One can get to Midtown by taking the Q train to the Avenue J subway station and just around the corner from the Avenue J subway stop is Di Fara's pizza. Di Fara's is a little pizza shop that has been on this Brooklyn corner for more than fifty years and Dom, the founder, chef and owner, has been making his secret pizza recipe there for all fifty of those years. Di Fara's opens at 11:00a and closes when they don't-a want to make-a no pizza anymore (they don't want to make any more pizza) and people will wait at least twenty minutes for a slice and sometimes up to two hours for a pie.

This week I was in New York and at the bidding of a Polish friend who had read about Di Fara's, I visited this shop that Anthony Bourdain describes as "legendary." It was about as it is described in countless newspapers and food magazines: small, full-of people and character, and with other-wordly pizza.

After a good, long wait, thirty-five minutes for our two slices, we were lucky enough to find two seats (of the ten seats available) just before our names were called. The pizza was beautiful and my polish friend and I shared this memorable pizza moment communicating more with sounds than words (not because we don't speak the same language).

Then, after our long wait and a proportionately short amount of time eating, it was over. But before we got up from the table my friend described, I think trying to make sense of what just happened, this as a mountaintop moment of pizza-eating but at some point we must step down. One cannot eat DiFara's pizza for a lifetime—especially when one doesn't live in Brooklyn. We visited the mountaintop of pizza and it was glorious but the day and our lives then went on.

Today, on this last Sunday before Epiphany we hear about Jesus, with Peter and James and John, on the mountaintop as Jesus is transfigured. At the end of our gospel lesson, Jesus leads them down the mountain. Today in our church year, we recognize the mountaintop and that this is not a place we stay for long. Jesus comes down the mountain and so to, do we.

The purpose of my trip to the northeast this week, the impetus, was not actually pizza but a lecture given by two visiting professors and friends.¹ The lecture was on praise and they explained, we know praise overflows when things are great and good--It is easy to give thanks and honor the Divine when we taste heaven. They also explained that the fullness of praise doesn't just come from gratitude that is easy and obvious but that the fullness of praise includes lament. Lament meaning when we express to God those things that are not going as we'd like them to, when we are hurting or feel wronged or lost. In other words, praise is at its fullest when we can love and find comfort in God no matter where we are: on the mountaintop, when we're just on plain ground or even in a valley. And this is not an ordinary, not even an instinctual reaction. It is, though, the way of *faith*.

As we prepare for Lent, which begins on Wednesday, I think Elisha's words from our Old Testament lesson can be helpful. Elijah, thought by many in Israel to be like Moses in greatness and

¹ Dr. David Ford and The Rev. Canon Chris Russel. *Praise*. February 7, 2018, Yale Divinity School.

closeness to God asks Elisha, his mentee and heir of sorts, before he is taken up to God, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha responds, “Please let me inherit a double share of your Spirit.”

Imagine if what we sought in Lent and at any time was the Spirit of God. Lent is not about pizza, it’s not about our eating habits or even habits in general but about becoming more filled with Spirit.

The spirit Elisha asks for is not spirit like the high energy of supporting a sports team nor is it a blind positivity. This spirit, raised from the life of faith involves our choice to trust God—not just as gift bearer, like a guest who brings me something I like, but a choice to trust the same God who may deliver a gift I would at first like to refuse. It is a spirit of faith that trusts and relies on God when things are great and when things fall apart or seem too much to bear. This spirit chooses love even when we are tired or think we have good reasons not to love. It comes from God and may turn upside down our reactions, responses or attitudes. Justin Welby, our Archbishop of Canterbury says, we should live in a way that would not make sense if God didn’t exist.

And the Spirit leads us to the mountaintop, those moments are there—we give thanks to God for times in our lives when we are at the highest points, sheer delight and bliss. As fantastic as they are we don’t stay there forever—I can’t eat DiFara’s pizza forever at some point the moment ends. Faith is not about our continuous return to the mountaintop it is finding God, praising God through the entirety of our journey. The spirit Elisha asks for and we can too is a spirit that loves and trusts the God who does not will our suffering but walks with us even through the darkest valley and up to the mountaintop and *everywhere* in between.

“Please let me inherit a double share of your Spirit.” It is time to think about our intention towards our Lenten journey this year. I invite you to use Elisha’s request as some form of your prayer this week as you prepare or as you are journeying in Lent. Ask God, “Please let me inherit a double share of your Spirit,” in the morning, or as you transition from one part of your day to the next or when you can feel shortness of temper or impatience creeping up. Trust God hears your prayer, open yourself to hear the Spirit that comes with it and see what God does. For this spirit brings a peace that passes all understanding and a joy that goes with us up to the mountains but also to the valleys. May our Lenten journeys be filled with a double share of the Spirit of God.