

CONNECTING OUR LIVES WITH SCRIPTURE

All of us have memories that only take a sound, smell, song, pain, or joy to become very real. Just a flash of that same sound, smell, song, pain, or joy acts as a trigger and transports us instantly to the original memory. We will never forget them. In fact if we are moved to share that memory with someone we often start by saying “I’ll never forget when.” The feelings flood in and we are literally there again

I have noticed that many people report a disconnect with some of our central sacramental moments. They prepare their children for baptism, communion, and confirmation because that is what good parents do, but there does not seem to be that “I’ll never forget when” type of connection. They prepare for their marriage, attend an ordination or funeral and again it is more a cultural experience than a spiritual one. This caused me to ponder. I have seen a groom sob as he marched out of the church with joy, not because of his recognition that the love he has for his bride mirrors the love God has for them, but because his bride had the soloist play “their” song. We have all experienced a congregation smile through their tears as they left for the cemetery, because they played “their loved ones favorite hymn.” We all remember in ways that are unique to each of us.

This reminded me of the tale of the young groom whose wife wanted him to saw off the end of the Easter ham for their first Easter dinner together. When he asked his nervous new bride why she did this, she only replied that that was the way her mother did it. Since they lived far from their families of origin he puzzled over this strange request, but went along with it with a mental note to check this strange custom out.

Time passed and they were together with her parents and sure enough there was ham for dinner, so he asked his mother-in-law why she did this. Her response was that this was the way her mother did it.

More time passed and now they were together with Grandma. So he resolved to solve this mystery. When he asked her why she cut off the end of the ham she replied “My pan was too small”.

Could it be that we baptize our babies, dress up our youth for their first communion, etc. because that was the way we did it in our family, having as little connection with the real reasons as our young bride and her ham? It is no mystery then that there is this disconnect. We need to be like the young groom and search out the connection; a connection that makes sense. Then we will get to the reality and can say with vigor “I’ll never forget when!”

After 37 years of facilitating scripture study groups I have come to realize that the goal is to connect the people with the original event of the scripture passage we are studying. Later on, while on retreat, the celebrant said at the consecration “When you do this, remember me”. This really stuck with me and got me to thinking.

We are told that the early church, long before we had gospels or any of what we have come to know as the New Testament, got together in homes to do what Jesus asked: that is, “Remember me”. They then would eat the meal that became what we now call the Mass together. Eventually, all of the original apostles were dead, and people began to realize that those memories might die with them. People decided that they had to write down those “I’ll never forget” events. Recently I began to wonder what it might look like to take the weekly gospel reading and look at it from the perspective of the people who composed the gospel of the week.

Now I invite you to imagine that you are a scribe at those weekly gatherings. Your task is to listen intently and write down what you heard and saw. Then the community would examine your work and refine it so as to accurately record that “something that should never be forgotten.” Two to three hundred years later, the church of the 4th century will take all those documents and decide which ones will be the ones to be included in the bible.

Among the many criteria seen to be critical for a yes vote for inclusion was how well the community using that particular gospel was doing? Were they able to instruct new members and form healthy faith communities? It seemed that they did a superb job for we still have “the faith”. But we seem to be flagging a bit when people report a “disconnect”. So let’s see if this approach helps to make some connections. So let us imagine together.