



I was thinking about Christmas foods. That is not unusual for me since I think about food all through the year. It seems that there are two main meals now associated with Christmas. The first would be the Christmas Eve celebration which has often grown more popular than the Christmas Day meal. Although the Masses of Christmas Eve keep me from attending a dinner of the seven fishes, such a meal must be wonderful. When I was a child, the only Mass on Christmas Eve was the midnight Mass. We still have a midnight Mass here at St. Martin's and people still call and ask what time is the midnight Mass. As a child, after midnight Mass, my family would leave church and go to my cousin Philomena's and have the most wonderful Irish breakfast which included great Irish sausages and thick Irish bacon. Now, after saying several masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, I very much look forward to the wonderful dinner that my family celebrates in Brooklyn with a turkey, ham, stuffing, sweet potatoes with marshmallows, cranberry, baked beans, and Irish soda bread, finished with a round of great desserts. There is an old joke that says give the gift that lasts all year: a fruit cake since nobody ever eats it. But one of my memories of Christmas was how happy my Mom was when our neighbor Mrs. Brennan would give us one of her homemade fruit cakes that were so very delicious and they did not last a day in our home. There are many foods we associate with Christmas, and we often hear people saying I have to go home and do my Christmas baking. Everyone has their own favorite type of cookies that are made with great love. Often times families make gingerbread houses but they never seem to eat them. In addition to the occasional adult beverage that might be tasted during the holidays, cider and egg

nog are two Christmas specialties. Candy canes are also very popular at Christmas but I prefer large chocolate Santa Clauses. Another memory of Christmas past for me is that my friend Father John McGowan, the pastor of my home parish at the time, would stop by our home to wish my mother a Merry Christmas. She would insist, in spite of being 10:00 o'clock in the morning, of giving him a shot of Irish Bailey's Cream.

By this point of this homily, you might wonder you accidentally had too much eggnog are attending an episode of the food channel. If this talk goes on you are going to start screaming, *Father, stop talking, you are making us hungry*. We can't *wait to go home and eat*. We are hungry, every human being who has ever lived is hungry, not only for the food that sustains them, gives them comfort and brings them together in both moments of great joy and in moments of sorrow, but we are hungry for God. You are here at this Mass to once again hear the greatest story ever told; God so loves the world that he sent his only son, that whoever believes him, may not die but will have eternal life. Jesus taught us that it is good to eat, but when we eat, we will get hungry and have to eat again. But when we have God in our lives, we meet the most essential longings and desires of the human heart. Even though we are not always aware of it, even though we may try to meet this hunger with possessions, success, achievement, money, family, friends, and however good these realities are and they are good, they will not satisfy our hungers and yearnings for God. Some of us try to deaden this hunger by food, alcohol, drugs, excessive work, and endless time on the internet; however, they do not relieve the deepest hungers of the heart. A great writer named St. Augustine wrote more than 1500 years ago; *our hearts are restless until they rest in thee my God*.

The word *Bethlehem*, the little town where Jesus was born, in Hebrew means *House of Bread*. Where does Jesus place their newborn child Jesus who is born in a stable? The Gospels tells us that they placed Jesus, the Son of God, fully human and fully divine, the God who created all that is and will ever be in the universe, in a manger. A manger is a place where food is placed and eaten by the farm animals. You think it a coincidence that the Son of God is born in a town named *House of Bread* and place in a food troth This godman Jesus will grow up to tell

us: Jesus declared, *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* When the child grows ups he will tell that *He is the Bread of Life.* The night before Jesus dies on the cross out of divine love for us, he takes bread and says *This is my Body which will be given up for you.* He takes a cup and says *this is my blood which will be shed for you.* Bruce Springsteen sings: *Everybody got a hungry heart.* Our hungry hearts bring us tonight to the manger of Bethlehem