

This last week, Mary Page, Nina, Julian, and I went back to Alabama to for a conference and then to spend time with Mary Page's mom and my parents. Now my parents live in rural northeast Alabama where it seems like every other house has their own vegetable garden. My dad grew a garden for most of his life until he retired and wanted to be able to come to Boston several times during the summer without worrying about his veggies dying. My mom every year would cook and freeze homegrown vegetables that we'd eat on throughout the year.

Before we moved here, our kids spent a lot of time at my parent's house and got to eat dad's home grown vegetables and mom's homegrown cooking a lot and they both had a clear favorite.

Fried okra

Do y'all know what fried okra is? Anybody ever had it?

Okra plants can grow taller than a person and you cut off the okra pod with a knife. You can boil it, steam it, cook it in a gumbo, but the very best way to cook it is to cut it in little pieces, coat them in corn meal, and then fry them.

And if you eat it with a fresh, home grown tomato, I mean, there really isn't anything better.

So, knowing that fried okra is my kids' favorite dish, guess what we had the first day we arrived at my parent's house?

I've got the picture to prove it. You think Nina likes okra?

But here's the thing, this is pretty early in the season for okra to come in. It's normally late July and early August before you can get a great okra harvest. Mom drove to the farmer's market and waited 30 minutes before it opened to make sure she got the okra before they sold out. After we ate it all gone, the next day, guess where Mom went?

The Farmer's market – 30 minutes early.

I tried to say, "Mom, it's ok. We don't have to have okra," to which she glared at me, "Oh yes, we do. My babies are here and they're gonna get what they want."

Friends, I'm telling you this story because I want you to think about that big plate of okra as you receive Communion today. When we came to Mom's house, she was going to make sure that she gave us her very best. It was one of many ways she expresses her love.

This table is Jesus' great act of love for us. It's God's way of saying, "I'm giving you my very best. Come and have a seat. Come and receive. Come and let me love you."

At this table, God not only wants to welcome you, God wants you to know that this is prepared especially for you, for all of us. You are loved more than you can imagine. You are accepted just as you are. This table is God rushing to the farmer's market, frying up okra, watching with joy as you eat again and again and again...all because God loves you so much.

Let's pray: Pour out your Holy Spirit....

## Homily

What I find most striking about this story is what Jesus couldn't do. He couldn't convince the two disciples that it was in fact Jesus, risen from the dead, just by talking to them. He couldn't find an argument persuasive enough. Rather, it was when Jesus and the two of them sat down at the dinner table and Jesus broke bread that they were able to see Jesus for who he truly was.

The most enduring symbol we have of Christianity is the cross, but, notice that wasn't the symbol Jesus picked for himself. It was the table. He broke bread and passed around the cup saying "Do this in remembrance of me." Sharing a meal together is the most enduring symbol of what Jesus was all about.

But a whole lot went into this table. In fact, that's what Jesus was trying to tell the two disciples on the road – everything that went into making the table possible.

If we were to read the whole Communion liturgy each time we received Communion, it's basically a retelling of the story of God's work as told throughout Scripture. It's the story of God creating the world, the story of God blessing Abraham and Sarah, the story of Moses and the liberation of God's people. It's the story of the prophets calling the people to be more just and less oppressive. And then, the Communion liturgy says, "In the fullness of time, God came to us in the person of Jesus," who taught us, performed miracles, suffered and died. And the table was the culmination of that whole story.

A lot went into this table.

I don't think it's a coincidence that Jesus chose food to be the symbol by which we remember him. Just as a lot has gone into making this table possible, have you ever stopped to think about all that goes in to just a single meal.

Do you ever stop and think about the seed that turned into the plant you're eating or the plants the animals ate that you're eating? Do you ever wonder how that seed ended up in soil. Or for that matter, do you ever think about the soil that provided that seed the nutrients it needed to

sprout. Or the water or the sun. Or what about the person who planted and tended the seed, who harvested it when it blossomed. And then those who sold the produce or the butchered meat. Finally, there was the one who prepared the food and who set the table.

There is so much that goes into every meal we ever eat just like there was so much that went into this table, so much that God did to show us that we all have a place at God's table.

Friends, over the course of the summer, we are invited on a journey of wonder. God has created this world in such a beautiful, amazing way. Each part of God's creation has such an important role to play. And it's our job to remember that; it's our job to safeguard that. But during this first week of the summer, we are sort of starting at the end and working our way back. This table, the bounty of the Earth, the full outpouring of God's love is where our journey inevitably leads us. But over the course of the next two months, we're going to explore together all that went into making this table possible, all that goes in to being able to enjoy the bounty of the world around us.

And maybe the first step in that journey is to simply be mindful and be grateful.

So may we always be mindful of the world around us – the air, the trees, the water, the soil.

May we remember how much goes into to every day things we may take for granted – each meal, each sip of water, each breath of air.

And may our mindfulness invite us all into a spirit of gratitude.

Be grateful for this table.

Be grateful for the gift of bread and juice.

Be grateful for all that nature provides, for all that God provides and remember it is all God's great act of love for us.

And out of gratitude, may each of us do all we can to care for the world around us, remembering how connected we all are to every aspect of it, and knowing that when we care for the world – it cares for us – just the way God designed it.

Amen.

During the course of the summer as we have our benediction and are sent out, we'll share with you something tangible you can do to care for all of God's creation. This week, I simply want to invite you to be mindful. So as you leave this place, may we all do so with a renewed commitment to pay attention to the beauty of the earth. May we remember the seeds, the soil, the water, the farmers every time we take a bite of food. May we remember all the gifts God

has given us, knowing that they are precious and always worth cherishing, always worth protecting.

Amen.