

***Bread Boss***  
Pentecost 9  
John 6:10-14, 24-35  
Sunday, August 2, 2009  
by Dr. Frank Trotter

A salesman from KFC walked up to the Pope and offers him a million dollars if he would change “The Lord's Prayer” from “give us this day our daily bread” to “give us this day our daily chicken.” The Pope refused his offer. Two weeks later, the man offered the pope 10 million dollars to change it from “give us this day our daily bread” to “give us this day our daily chicken” and again the Pope refused the man’s generous offer. Another week later, the man offered the Pope \$20 million dollars and finally the Pope accepted. The following day, the Pope said to all his officials, “I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that we have just received a check for \$20 million dollars. The bad news is that we lost the Wonder Bread account!”

Bread has been both a necessity and a source of comfort from the very beginnings of human civilization. A new movie about the life of Julia Child and starring Meryl Streep opens this week; if you ever watched her TV show, you know how long and hard she worked at being to bake the perfect loaf of French bread with American all-purpose flour in an American oven. Some of you will recall that Frank McCourt, the well-known Irish writer and author of the best-selling memoir, *Angela’s Ashes*, died recently one month shy of his seventy-ninth birthday. In *Angela’s Ashes*, McCourt writes, “Oh, God above, if heaven has a taste it must be an egg with butter and salt, and after the egg is there anything in the world lovelier than fresh warm bread and a mug of sweet golden tea?”<sup>1</sup>

Several months ago, I stumbled upon a television show called “Cake Boss”<sup>2</sup> which airs on The Learning Channel (TLC/Discovery) on Monday nights at 10 p.m. Each week, the show follows Buddy Valastro, the Master Baker at Carlo’s City Hall Bake Shop in Hoboken, New Jersey, and his large Italian family as they create one amazing cake after another for their customers. It might be a fire engine cake complete with working lights, sirens, and smoke;

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<sup>1</sup> Frank McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes* (New York, Scribner, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> “Cake Boss” web site, <http://tlc.discovery.com/tv/cake-boss/cake-boss.html>.

or a charity bi-plane cake for a local hospital; or an old-school wedding cake like his father used to bake – tall, ornate, and filled with live birds.

While its fun to watch the cakes being created from scratch, a lot of the fun is also in watching how Buddy and his family work together to get everything accomplished. It's a family business after all, and when you are working with your mother, your four older sisters, and your three brothers-in-law, there's got to be lots of drama. But there's also a lot of love as they finally get on the same recipe page with each other and produce the cakes as promised and on time. Just finishing its first season on TLC, "Cake Boss" has attracted almost 2.5 million viewers each week and has just been renewed for its second season.

Being curious about this idea of a family bakery, I began searching the web for other stories – and there are many of them out there. One of the most interesting bakeries is called the Great Harvest Bread Company. Its founders were a couple of college kids – Laura and Pete – who met at Cornell University in the early 1970's and figured out that they could help pay their tuition by baking "amazing scratch-made whole grain bread."<sup>3</sup> In 1975 Laura and Pete got married and decided to hike Montana from north to south as part of their honeymoon. When they fell in love with the state, it made all the sense in the world that they should open their first bakery in Great Falls in 1975.

Word about the bakery began to spread quickly and by 1978 the couple was approached by neighbors asking if they could open a second Great Harvest Bread Company store. Today, Great Harvest, now located in Dillon, Montana, has grown into "the nation's first family of independently owned and operated whole grain bread bakeries... There are more than 200 Great Harvest bakeries located across the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii."<sup>4</sup> (The closest one I could find is located in Newbury Park, CA.)

Why has this bakery chain become so popular? One of the traditions that Laura and Pete started in their bakery was that they would treat their employees and even their customers as "family" to intentionally work at creating an atmosphere of camaraderie and cooperation. A second was there

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<sup>3</sup> "History of the Great Harvest Bread Company," <http://www.greatharvest.com/company/history.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

should be good music playing at all times. A third was that each customer would be offered a free slice of hot bread with honey on it.

Great Harvest even has a Vision Statement: “When individual bakery owners succeed and grow, the entire Great Harvest franchise family succeeds and grows. To support the success of our owners, we teach and actively model the mission statement of being loose and having fun, giving generously to others, creating strong and exciting bakeries, baking phenomenal bread, and running fast to serve customers. We believe our success comes from a strong commitment to uphold the legacy and integrity of the Great Harvest brand with its focus on the customer experience, and the promise of phenomenal tasting products made with freshly-milled whole grain blended with pure and simple ingredients. In short, we create, share, and teach the tools that bakery owners use to personalize their bakeries and achieve their unique goals within the context of the Great Harvest franchise agreements. Through the collective knowledge we share, and the learning communities we facilitate, Great Harvest Franchising, Inc., remains the envy of the franchise industry.”<sup>5</sup>

That’s a wonderful vision statement. It occurred to me as I read it for the first time that it sort of sounds like a church’s vision statement, doesn’t it? Mike Ferretti, the current CEO, “understands, as Jesus did, that you don’t just eat bread; you experience bread.”<sup>6</sup> If it’s true that people everywhere are in search of wonderful bread, in one shape or another, it’s not a big jump to suggest that “what they really crave is the bread that gives life to the world.”<sup>7</sup>

In the Gospel of John, Jesus provides several metaphors (known as the “I am” verses or sayings) to help his audiences understand who he is. If I gave you a quiz on the “I am” verses, it would be interesting to see how many you can remember:

- Jesus said: “I AM the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12).
- Jesus said: “You are from below; I AM from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.” (John 8:23)

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<sup>5</sup> “Vision Statement”, Great Harvest Bread Company, <http://www.greatharvest.com/company/philosophy.html>.

<sup>6</sup> “Homiletics Online,” [http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl\\_display.asp?installment\\_id=3191](http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=3191).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

- Jesus said: “I AM the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9)
- Jesus said: “I AM the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)
- Jesus said: “I AM the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” (John 11:25)
- Jesus said: “I AM the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)
- Jesus said: “I AM the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.” (John 15:1).
- Jesus said: “I AM the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.” (John 6:51)

For me, this last quote is one of the most important verses in the Gospels. For me, this single “I am” saying tells me that Almighty God, as known to us in Jesus Christ, is the primary source of all of my needs, of all of my hungers, and is the one who sustains me throughout life’s journey. For me, Jesus is the “Bread Boss” – the central one who teaches us about the kingdom of God and nourishes our soul all at the same time.

But as we come to this Holy Table this morning to celebrate once more the holy meal, we are also reminded that the Sacrament is never just for the individual. Jesus, as our divine host, opens this table for everyone, especially those in the greatest need.

Famous quotes:

- “There are people in the world so *hungry*, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.” - Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)
- “Bread for myself is a material question. Bread for my neighbor is a spiritual one.” - Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948)
- “In the Lord’s Prayer, the first petition is for daily bread. No one can worship God or love his neighbor on an empty stomach.” - President Woodrow Wilson (1856 – 1924)

- “Love does not just sit there, like a stone; it has to be made, like bread, remade all the time, made new.” - Ursula K. Le Guin (1929 - )

There’s a story about a shopper at the local mall who felt the need for a coffee break. So she bought herself a little bag of cookies and put them in her shopping bag. She then got in line for coffee, found a place to sit at one of the crowded tables, and then, taking the lid off her coffee and taking out a magazine, she began to sip her coffee and read. Across the table from her a man sat reading a newspaper. After a minute or two, she reached out and took a cookie. As she did, the man seated across the table reached out and took one, too. This totally surprised her, but she smiled and didn’t say anything.

A few moments later she took another cookie. Once again the man did so, too. Now she was a bit irritated. He should get his own cookies and not presume upon her good nature. After having a couple of sips of coffee, she once again took another cookie. So did the gentleman seated near her.

Now she was upset — especially since now only one cookie remained. Apparently the man also realized that only one cookie was left. Before she could say anything, he took it, broke it in half, offered half to her, and proceeded to eat the other half himself. Then he smiled at her and, putting the paper under his arm, rose and walked off.

The woman was irate! Her coffee break ruined, already thinking ahead of how she would tell this offense to her family, she folded her magazine, opened her shopping bag – and there discovered her own unopened bag of cookies.

When we come to this table, it is always important to focus on who we are and why we have come to this Holy Table – a foreshadowing, an echo in reverse of the Heavenly Table that has been prepared for all those who will dwell with God throughout eternity. When we come to this table, we are reminded of our own unworthiness and our need of grace. For “when we receive the bread offered during Holy Communion, it’s the spiritual equivalent of receiving free bread.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> From “The Artisan Bread Church,” Homiletics Online, [http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl\\_display.asp?installment\\_id=3191&item\\_id=44817&keywords=bread](http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=3191&item_id=44817&keywords=bread).

“No matter how you slice it ..., the ‘real’ bread and ‘real’ drink connect us deeply and spiritually with God through Christ. We are nourished by the grace we receive, encouraged by the diverse crowd around us and strengthened to live life to the full. There’s no substitute for the love and life we experience when we break the Bread of Life. Like Peter we cry out, ‘Lord, to whom [else] shall we go? You [alone] have the words of eternal life’ (v. 68 NIV).”

Thanks be to God.

Amen.