

Archbishop Smith: Celebrating our Heritage

I'm writing this blog post during what we in Alberta call the Heritage Day long weekend. The first Monday of August is designated a civic holiday in this province in recognition and honour of the wonderful variety of cultures among our citizens. Over the years, waves of immigration have brought to this land a broad diversity of peoples, whose cultural heritage has greatly enriched Alberta society. Here in Edmonton we have a weekend-long Heritage Festival, during which thousands of people come together not only to see multiple displays of song, dance and costume but also – and this seems to be the biggest attraction – to eat the food!



Various foods from the Scandinavian tent at the Edmonton Heritage Festival. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

Hmm. Heritage and food. They're inseparable. Here we find an opening into the teaching of Sacred Scripture proclaimed at mass on Sunday.



The Upper Room in Jerusalem today. This was the location of the Last Supper where Jesus Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

Our heritage as a Catholic people is linked with a meal. My mind goes to the teaching of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" (1Cor 11:23-25) Heritage is what is handed on through time, what we receive, preserve and carry forward to future generations. The heritage of Christian faith, handed down from the Apostles, who received it from Christ, has at its centre a meal. Indeed, a meal that is far more than just a meal. As the people who rush to the food at the Heritage Festival, so should we – even moreso! – be those who make haste to partake of that Sacred Meal we call the Eucharist.



Fr. Gabriel Udeh serving communion at the monthly Nigerian African Community Mass at St. Dominic Savio Church. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

It is precisely this meal that is the heart of this weekend's sacred texts. Jesus speaks of himself as "the bread of God that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:33) For this reason, Jesus speaks of himself as the "bread of life" (John 6:35), which is the gift he makes of himself in the Eucharist.



Ruins of a 4th-Century synagogue stands where Jesus gave his Bread of Life Discourse. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

Our Catholic heritage is extraordinarily rich. I think, for example, of the manner in which that heritage is interwoven with the history of this province: of the religious leaders and consecrated women and men who established the Church in Alberta; whose heroic efforts launched healthcare, education and social outreach; and whose memory is enshrined in the names of some of our towns, such as Lacombe, Leduc and Legal. This rich history of effective evangelization and societal foundation could not have happened without the food that is the very heart of the heritage – Jesus, the bread of Life, given in the Eucharist. Jesus satisfies all hunger and slakes all thirst (John 6:35). As recipients of a wondrous and sacred heritage, let us approach the Lord's table in humility and joy, draw from this food strength for the journey and hope for eternal life, and always be ready to hand on this good news to those who come after us.



St. Michael Catholic Church in Leduc, Alberta. The city was named after Fr. Hippolyte Leduc. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media