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# MANGIA!

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Nice kids, the Martinellis, Ralph and Teresa were students of mine back in my high school teaching days. They were bright, well-mannered, friendly, and a pleasure to have in class. Both their parents were Italian born, and Ralph, to put it politely, was a walking advertisement for Mamma Martinelli's good cooking.

As a lover of Italian food in general and pasta in particular, I one day asked Ralph about his mom's spaghetti. "Best in the world," he pronounced. I had no reason to doubt it. "How about an invitation?" I asked.

A week later I was seated at the Martinelli's table waiting for a feast. Incidentally, if you don't know Italian mothers, there is one word in their lexicon that is used more often than any other. "*Mangia!*" That sounded like a cross between a plea and command. (Mangia means "eat")

But then came the awakening. I had forgotten, that in any true Italian household, the pasta is only prelude to the main course. Off went the spaghetti platter and on came roast beef, mashed potatoes with gravy, two vegetables, and dinner rolls. I was doomed!

After the fruit, cheese and dessert, I was so stuffed I could no longer bend in the middle. In seating myself in the living room after dinner, I literally had to place myself in a chair in such a way that I was a straight line from head to toe, like a board resting against a piece of furniture. Later that night as I was drifting off to sleep, one word kept vibrating in my head, "Mangia!"

If it isn't too irreverent, the Scripture readings for the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the year makes me think of God in the image of a warm and wonderful "Italian Momma saying "Mangia!" to her family.

"Come, receive grain and eat! Heed me and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare" (Words of Isaiah).

A mother's desire to feed her family well involves a great deal more than food. She wants to see her loved ones content, healthy, and happy. Her table is an expression of her heart: Open, giving, caring. She wants the best for those she loves. So our God "Feeds us, answers all our needs" (Psalm response). Our God wants to give us everything we need to make us whole: Truth, healing, forgiveness, freedom, peace, love. Our God does not want to see us spend our lives or waste our gifts on things that will leave us empty or incomplete. "Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy" (Again Isaiah).

Ultimately, God gives us ...God, in the flesh and blood person of His Son. "I am the bread come down from heaven, eat and live." As a mother's love embraces her children, drawing them to her heart, so our God reaches out to us in Jesus. Absolutely nothing "will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, Our Lord" (Reading from Romans).

In its full context, Matthew's account of the multiplication of loaves and fishes is a sublime expression of Jesus' love and devotion to us all. "When he saw the vast throng (crowd), his heart was moved with pity." It was the entire human family he saw... "And cured their sick." Not just physical maladies; it was loneliness,

brokenness, sinfulness, emptiness. He wants to feed us all. He wants none to go away hungry. “There is no need to tell them to disperse.”

But there is still more. He wants us to turn to “feed” each other—to forgive and nurture and care for and love one another. “You give them something to eat yourselves.”

It’s like the disciples of old, we go to the Lord and say that in the light of the world’s hunger, anything we have will only be a fraction of what is needed, He will respond: “Bring what you have to me.” The miracle is allowing Him to bless and break us so that “all may have their fill.” If we who are Christians place ourselves in the hands of Christ giving Him all that we have and all that we are, there will be more than enough love to go around.

We need to open up our arms and our hearts to all our brothers and sisters and in the words of our God say: “Mangia!”

[Added by Teresa:

“O taste and see that the LORD *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in him” (Ps. 34:8; KJV)

“O taste and see that the Lord [our God] is good! Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) is the man who trusts and takes refuge in Him” (Ps. 34:8; Amplified Bible).]