

Anyone for tea?

Since I retired, I have drank more tea in the past six months than I ever drank in America during my previous forty years there. While in the States, I was very disciplined in my tea drinking habits. Breakfast usually began before 5 a.m., I took a break for a cup of tea and maybe some goodies around 9 a.m. In the late afternoon, around 3 p.m., I had a cup of tea again and possibly some homemade treats. Such tea breaks were special, sacred moments to steal away, sip on a cup of tea and ponder some pregnant thoughts that would percolate into some greater insight into life or into a column for Gulf Pine Catholic.

Now, as far as tea drinking is concerned, there is no discipline. There are no set times, rules, excuses. I usually have tea when I feel like it or when someone in the family, simply says, "I think we'll have a cup of tea" and so it happens.

I have been thinking about the practice of tea drinking of late, seeing that it is so unregulated, so common, so every day, so "let's have a cup of tea" without having a reason to have it. But, on a much deeper level, I have found lots of deeper reasons to have a cup of tea, not only because surveys indicate that tea can be good for you.

The first interesting observation is that, seeing that one does not need an excuse to have tea, or when to have it, or with whom one has it; there are no constraints on what happens during sharing a cup of tea. The conversation can go from taking about local gossip to commenting on the latest national news bulletin; from sharing some past memories to discovering one's neighbor has cancer; from the cost of living to the everyday conversation about the weather; from discovering the latest person who has emigrated to the price of livestock at the local cattle mart.

Secondly, someone dropping in unexpectedly warrants a chance to stop and visit, share a cup of tea and some goodies whether it be early in the morning or late at night. That chance drop in provides an opportunity for the host to visit, to catch up on news, to renew acquaintances, to celebrate a friendship.

Thirdly, if one has been out working in the fields, one takes a break. They enter, put on the kettle, sit down, rest weary bones and replenish body and soul with a natural conversation. The same happens if one had been out shopping. Rather than stopping in for a cup of tea in the local coffee shop, it is much more rewarding and relaxing to have a cup of tea at home to celebrate the accomplishment of an often stressful shopping experience.

Years ago, in Ireland, certain houses in an area were known as "Rambling houses." It was a practice that people could ramble into them at any hour of the day or night and one would be welcomed in song, story and nourishment. Today's simple sharing of a cup of tea with a regular visitor or an unexpected visitor, with a family member or with oneself; continues the therapeutic effect of celebrating, of sharing, of listening, of caring, of bonding, of empowering.

Reflecting on this simple but profound experience of sharing a cup of tea draws me more into the life of Jesus. He spoke so many times in the context of a meal. He visited in people's home where he shared hospitality with them. He multiplied loaves and fishes as he opened up deeper hungers in people's lives. He spoke about heaven as the great banquet where one will share completely in the life of God and, He gathered his closest friends to celebrate a Passover, a Last Supper, a most mysterious and powerful moment when he shared not only friendship but his very self.

It is interesting that Jesus left us one thing and one ritual: his Word and the Eucharist. Around these two gifts, he built a community which we call "church." In the same way, a mini expression of the human word and the sharing of a cup of tea, is a simple, yet profound way, of celebrating the local church in action.

Of course, you may have guessed it. I wrote all this while sipping on a cup of tea and munching on some goodies as I share my own inner conversation with you, my readers, over a cup of tea.