

It's hard to imagine a Halloween night without chocolate candy; harder still to imagine a "trick-or-treat" bag full of mashed potatoes. Yet, for little Isaac, that's what would have made the grandest celebration ever. While one might rush to pour pity on the little witch because his taste buds just could not savor what so many others drooled over, more so might we pity the many who lack the ability to see in such ordinary fare the best food this side of heaven. Isaac is more to be envied than pitied, for if all he wanted on Halloween night was mashed potatoes, his future life is sure to be full of eye-popping wonderment. When the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, first gained use of his eyes, all that others saw as mundane was, for him, quite extraordinary. So, I imagine, will it be for Isaac.

As another Halloween approaches, what is it we want to fill our "trick-or-treat" bags with this year? Like so many masqueraded children who will celebrate the Eve of All Saints, is it mouthfuls of delicious sweetness we want? Or rather, like the wise witch Isaac, might we wish for renewed taste buds that ordinary, everyday foodstuffs would taste all the more exquisite? That mashed potatoes would be the ultimate reminder of God's goodness?

With Isaac, let the example of the blind beggar Bartimaeus inspire us as we prepare to celebrate the November 1st Feast of All Saints; those holy women and men who have preceded us possessed of uncommon insight. These holy ones have known all along that mashed potatoes were the best food this side of heaven. They've known all along that God loves us just as we are, not hidden beneath face-lifts, liposuction, tummy tucks, hair coloring, or even a witch's costume.

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A publication of the Congregation of Holy Cross,
United States Province of Priests and Brothers
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OCTOBER 2018

MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

Real Food

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“A middle-aged woman had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. While in the emergency room, she had a near-death experience. Seeing God, she asked, ‘Is my time up?’ God replied, ‘No, you have another 43 years, 2 months and 8 days to live.’ Upon recovery, the woman decided to stay in the hospital and have a face-lift, liposuction and a tummy tuck. She even had someone come in and change her hair color. Since she had so much more time to live, she figured she might as well make the most of it. After the last operation, she was released from the hospital. While crossing the street on her way home, she was killed by a passing ambulance. Arriving at the Pearly Gates, she demanded of God, ‘I thought you said I had another 40 years? Why didn’t you pull me out of the path of that ambulance?’ God replied, ‘I didn’t recognize you.’” (Original source unknown)

The joke, of course, is based on the ridiculous premise that God might not recognize us. But God, knowing all things, can see right through a face-lift, weight loss and change of hair color. Not so for us mortals, though. Not only do we sometimes fail to recognize one another, we also fail to recognize God, whose presence is perceived more by the stirring of the heart than by the acuity of the eye. Sadly, while God is never blind to us, we are frequently blind to God.

Consider in St. Mark’s Gospel the account of the blind beggar Bartimaeus who approaches Jesus asking for healing. Already aware of the presence of the miracle-working savior by the stirring of his heart, he begs Jesus to give him the gift of outward sight. “Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’” (*Mark 10:51*) And Jesus, knowing the great faith of the petitioner, readily grants the request.



Early one morning some years back, a group of us hospital chaplains gathered over coffee and pastries to review events of the day previous. In the course of passing the tempting offering, Maggie declined to indulge, explaining that,

while sweets held no special allure for her taste buds, Isaac, her son, actually detested sweets. Then, while the other four of us munched away, Maggie related Isaac’s first experience of Halloween “trick-or-treating.”

Having prepped the three-year-old child for the wondrous bounty of the holiday tradition, Maggie dressed up her son in a passable witch costume and armed him with a generous sack for the collection of goodies. Leaving their house to wander the neighborhood, she issued Isaac instructions in Halloween etiquette. “Now, Isaac, ring the doorbell, and when someone answers, say ‘trick-or-treat,’ and then they’ll drop something good to eat in your bag.”

Standing vigilant at a close distance from each door at which Isaac rang, Maggie watched her son’s bag become heavy with stash. Strangely, though, as Isaac left each door, rather than the expectant glee at his catch, more and more despondent did he seem as Milky Ways, Almond Joys and Snickers bars fell into his possession. After a dozen forays to lit doorways, Maggie pulled the sullen witch to her side to inquire about his obvious sadness.

“Isaac, what’s the matter?” The little witch, near tears, opened his sack for his mom to peruse. “Look what they gave

me!” Peering into the bag and seeing a wondrous assortment of chocolate confections, Maggie looked into the eyes of the weepy witch. “Mom, all I wanted was mashed potatoes. Why did they put this stuff in my bag?”

“ **... we also fail to recognize God, whose presence is perceived more by the stirring of the heart than by the acuity of the eye.** ”

His tears now flowing copiously, Mom explained to her son how very unique he truly was, since most kids thought that chocolate candy was the best food on earth, while he, her very special child, knew the truth: Mashed potatoes was the real food of the gods. Then, realizing that there was no salvaging Halloween from the mundane offerings of her neighbors, Maggie and Isaac drove to a nearby Kentucky Fried Chicken where the wee witch dug into a generous mound of his favorite food.