

"EATING COLD GRITS"

A Sermon By

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106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
May 9, 1993

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INTRODUCTION

As far as I know, Tony Pena is still catching for the Boston Red Sox. Tony grew up in the Dominican Republic. Life there was not easy. Last July in an article in Guideposts, Tony Pena said that the person "who had the greatest influence on his life was his mother."

It is the dream of most boys raised in the Dominican Republic to one day play baseball in the United States. Down there young boys grow up swinging old broom handles or "anything else they can get their hands on for a bat, trying to hit a ball a little quicker or a bit farther than anyone else"...hoping one day to play "beisbol" here in our major leagues.

Tony Pena gives credit to his mother not only for teaching him and his brothers how to play baseball, but also for giving him a love for the game. His mother had been a pretty good softball player herself when she was young. When school was out and chores were done, she'd walk her boys to a nearby pasture and there she would stand on a rough dirt patch that served as the pitcher's mound and pitch to her sons. She'd call in...

"All right, little Luis...this pitch will be right down the middle". And then, when it was Tony's turn at bat, she would say, "Okay, Tony....look for this one in on the fists. You must learn to hit the inside pitch."

Tony Pena is thankful for the influence of his mother. He tells us that before he left for the United States, he prayed...

"God, all I want from life is to be able to help my family. Please, God, help me do that...." And Tony has helped his family. He writes, "not long after I made the majors, I drove with Mama through the streets of Santiago" As they were driving, Tony asked his mother..."what do you think of that house over there? Take a good look, Mama." His mother replied, "Tony, it's a wonderful house...why do you ask...are you thinking of buying it?"

He paused, hardly able to contain himself. Handing her a set of keys, he said,

"I already have, Mama...for you!" "Oh, Tony" she said as tears began to stream down her face. At that special moment, Tony writes, "I thanked God for giving me such a mother!"

SACRIFICE

Chances are that you've had such a special moment in your life, too when you've been moved to thank God for such a mother! And who is not moved by someone who makes a willing sacrifice in our behalf? Whether it's a mother or a grandmother or whomever it might be. We appreciate those who have sacrificed on our behalf. The word is sacrifice. That's the first word of today's sermon.

Let me tell you about another man whose name is Willis Moore. He recalls that his grandmother always ate cold grits. She preferred them hot, but it was her priorities that caused them to be cold. He fondly remembers how his

"Grandmother would cook a hot breakfast...fresh farm eggs, crisp bacon, homemade blackberry jelly and biscuits and bowls of hot grits".

The family would gather round the table and his grandmother would ask the blessing.

And then while the family was eating breakfast his grandmother would read devotions to the family. When she prayed everyone stopped eating and bowed their heads. Afterward everyone cheerfully joined in table conversation while finishing off that good breakfast. But Willis Moore remembers that only then did my grandmother start to eat her breakfast and that's why she always ended up eating cold grits.

He remembers those special mornings and the example of his saintly grandmother. At that time it didn't really seem that important, but as the years rolled on he came to recognize the significance of those "cold grits". He writes,

"Spiritual formation is the memory of my Grandmother putting God first at breakfast. Of course she did so in the other areas of her life, too, but the memory of her putting aside a hot breakfast to share God's word with her family feeds me even yet!"

You and I respond to such a sacrifice, don't we? I remember with deep gratitude and great affection some of those things that my parents did for me as I was growing up which at the time I failed to recognize as being something of a sacrifice. I'm sure somewhere in your memory box you have a few things listed, too.

And yes, the disciples of Jesus. They, too, responded to sacrifice. The disciples looked up to Jesus. He called each of them and they followed Him. And for the better part of three years they listened to Him and learned from Him. Over and over again Jesus tried to prepare them for His impending suffering and death. And they had a difficult time understanding what He was talking about. They were confused and uncertain about what was going to happen next. He sensed their uneasiness and their anxiety and He sought to reassure them. Those wonderful words from John's Gospel come to mind.

"Do Not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in Me.
In My Father's house are many mansions....I would not have told you if it were not so...."

Still, they needed to know that before there could be mansions, there would be misery. No gain without some pain, to use a modern cliché. No triumph without trial. No crown without a cross. Love always requires sacrifice. Eating cold grits is not only the nature of a loving grandmother, but it is also the nature of a loving God.

Who among us is not moved to respond to such a sacrifice?

EXAMPLE

Who among us would not follow such an example. And there's a second "key" word for this Mother's Day, the word, example.

One of the disciples, Thomas, asked Jesus a question that no doubt some of the other disciples had wanted to ask Him. It's there in John's Gospel, chapter 14.

"Lord, we do not know where You are going and how can we know the Way?" And Jesus replied, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life...."

The disciples wanted to know where Jesus was going and if they could get there, too. We can understand that. Jesus told them that if they wanted to go to the same place He was going then all they had to do was to follow Him.

James Moore, in a book entitled, Yes, Lord, I Have Sinned, but I Have Several Excellent Excuses, remembers how as a seven year old he got lost at the circus, the Ringling Brothers Circus. It was a terribly frightening experience for him....a seven year old boy and 20,000 people. He and his older brother, Bob, went to the concession stand to buy some cotton candy. And the people were pushing and pressing toward the counter. Bob, being taller, was waited on first. He got his cotton candy and stepped to one side so that his smaller brother could get his order "in". Just about the same moment some loud laughter came from the circus arena and Bob turned to see what was going on. He didn't mean to leave his seven year old brother behind, but you know how things go. He got caught up in the excitement of the moment and edged over to where he could see.

Seven year old little Jim got his cotton candy and then turned to look for his brother but he was no where to be seen. In the moment of panic, nothing looked familiar to little Jim. He was lost. He began to think he would never again see his family and he recalls the feelings that came over him.

"I started to run...trying to fight back the tears. I couldn't see my brother anywhere. The people were all laughing at the antics of the clowns, but it wasn't funny to me at the moment. I thought to myself, 'how can they laugh at a time like this...at a moment when I'm feeling so lost?'"

Just then Jim felt a touch on his shoulder. He turned around and saw his father.

"My father had come after me and had found me. He held me and reassured me...then bought me a Coke and a hot dog, a yo-yo, a lizard, a little stuffed bear and a candy apple. I learned a valuable lesson that day. Being lost is terrible. Being found is wonderful!"

Jesus wanted His disciples to know that even though He would no longer be around with them that He would not allow them to get lost. He would be with them every step of the way. He is the Way. And all they had to do was follow along after Him. Who would not respond to such a sacrifice? Who would not follow such an example. But let's move on.

A FRIEND Who would not welcome having a friend like Jesus? I'm sure the disciples were still a bit confused and anxious. Remember it was Philip who then asked,

"Lord....show us the Father and we will be satisfied..."

And there is a hint of frustration in the voice of Jesus as He turns to answer Philip. Catch His words...

"Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know Me?"

Why, it's almost like Jesus is saying...."how many times do I have to tell you people the same thing before you believe?" "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father..." There's more to Jesus than simply knowing "about Him" - where He was born, or how many sermons He preached, or who were His friends. To really know Jesus means that He dwells in us. For His is the spirit of the Living God.

I'm fond of the story of the four year old little girl who had a cut near her eye. Her father took her to see the doctor. The cut was not that serious, but the location of the cut, of the injury, made it important that it be fixed properly. A couple of stitches were needed, but the doctor didn't want to give the little girl an anesthetic. He explained to her that the procedure would be a bit painful and asked her if she could stand it. The little girl replied that she could, if her father would hold her hand. The father took her in his lap and put an arm around her and held her tight. The doctor did his work quickly and the little girl never flinched. The father could not possibly have erased the pain from the process, but if he had not been there...the girl's reaction would have been much different.

And so it was for the disciples. The time was fast approaching when they would split up and go their separate ways in bearing witness to the Good News of Christ. Jesus would not be with them - physically, but He wanted them to know, however, that they would not be alone...that His hand would still be in theirs...and that made all the difference in the world - to them and it still does!

Three key words to reflect on as you think of this passage from John's Gospel. Sacrifice. Who would not respond to such a sacrifice? Example. And who would not be willing to follow such an example? And Friend. Who would not welcome having such a friend along life's path as Jesus.

OUR PART The name of Chuck Swindoll is familiar to some of you. One day Chuck Swindoll found a book on his shelf that had once belong to his mother. And as he was looking through it he recalled some special memories of her. She had died some twenty years before. She had written some notes in the margins of this book little knowing the impression her words would make on her son some twenty years later.

At the end of the book his mother had written these words, "Finished reading this on May 8th, 1958." And that started a flood of memories for Chuck Swindoll. He tried to think back to where he was and what he was doing on the 8th day of May in the year 1958. The month that his mother finished reading this book he was a Marine stationed on a tiny island in the South Pacific. That very month he had written in his Journal,

"The Lord has convinced me that I am to be in His service.
I will begin to make plans for a lifetime of ministry..."

Amazingly, at the same time his mother was finishing reading her book. Charles Swindoll writes that "as I looked back over the pages, I found one reference after another to her prayers for me...as I was away."

His mother was deeply concerned for his spiritual welfare and for God's best in his life.

Sitting there that afternoon in his study...many years after his mother had passed away...looking through this book that had belonged to his mother and finding some notes there and recalling some precious memories...he went on to write,

"There I sat, thanking God anew for my mother's prayers, for my pilgrimage and especially for His presence. Faithfully, graciously, quietly He had led me and helped me and blessed me. I bowed my head and thanked Him for His sustaining grace. And I wept with gratitude.

Chuck Swindoll was moved by his mother's sacrifice and by her example. By these she had led him to God. This is a story, I believe, that could be told in many homes on a day like this. Some special memories of a mother's love. Yes, the story of mothers and fathers, of grandmothers and grandfathers, of friends and guardians and faithful people who themselves have been moved by the sacrifice and the example of Christ Himself. Who would not welcome having such a friend.

So I leave you with this thought. Is that how your children will remember you? Will they remember the bowl of cold grits...grits made cold by a concern for their spiritual welfare? If so, regardless of whatever else in this life you may or may not accomplish, your life will be an unqualified success. For sacrifice and example - remember that these are the "stuff" of love...and these are the "stuff" that lead us closer to God

PRAYER

We thank You, O God, for those who have brought You near to us, and led us into Your presence. As we think of them this day, release in us the strength and wisdom they once gave to us and to others, that in these days of stress and strain, we may have in some small measure the love and the life they had in such abundance. We ask this in the name of Him who is the Life and whose life is given for us all, Jesus Christ. Amen.

GREETING TO THE CHILDREN: May 9, 1993

INTRODUCTION

Boys and girls, there's a verse of scripture in John's Gospel (Chapter 19) that reads like this:

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, Mary...
His mother..."

I've always felt that the Gospel writer could so easily have inserted the words, "of course".....

"Of course now there stood by the cross of Jesus,
Mary, His mother....."

For this is where MOTHERS ARE.....standing by us...time and again. Today is Mother's Day. How important it is that we thank our mothers for always standing by us. They have given us some real treasures along the way...treasures like faith, and hope and love - which outlasts all things. Let us nourish those treasures and thank our mothers for them!

TODAY IS SPECIAL

Today is special for us because we are celebrating the baptism of one of you....Sabrina Catherine Hanson...and I understand that you all are going to have a part in this by singing a song....what are the words: "Come in to the waters, Sabrina". This is a tune brought to us by our Lay Leader...invite you to sing it and then we shall move to the BAPTISMAL FONT...(which Carl Condra told you is not a bird bath two weeks ago....)

BAPTISM

Now, let me invite Sabrina...and her parents - Bjorn and Cathy Hanson...to join me here at the baptismal font....and also their friends Betty Jo and Brian Boffo....and the Godparents: Rudy and Betty Hanson....

PASTORAL PRAYER: May 9, 1993

O ETERNAL SPIRIT....FATHER and MOTHER of our spirits....again we would pause amidst the noise and clamor of this great city, and in the routine of our daily life to REMEMBER YOU.

And here we would be still and know that YOU are GOD - our Maker, our Redeemer, our refuge and our strength.

Here we would talk to YOU as children to a parent...and would listen quietly and attentively for that word that touches our lives and makes a difference.

FOR HEALTH, HOME and HAPPINESS - we lift our hearts "in praise" and "in thanksgiving."

Teach us how to be grateful for those darker and more difficult moments that have brought us closer to YOU, that have made us more conscious of spiritual power and inner spiritual resources.

May we live this week that is now beginning as those who have been significantly touched by the Christ-spirit...that His concern, His compassion, His courage and His compassion may flow through our lives...touching others...making a difference in the home, the office...on the street...in the bus.

ON THIS SPECIAL DAY, OUR thoughts turn to the gentle influence of the home,
to the ministry of motherhood,
to the unity of family life.

Teach us the wisdom of keeping family ties sacred and strong through joyous love, mutual understanding, shared concern.

We bless you, O Lord, for the precious ideal of motherhood. And grateful we are for the lasting influence and touch of all good mothers on our lives. For their gentleness, their loyalty, their love and their patience, we give YOU our THANKS.

We bless you, too, Lord, for those who have never had children of their own, but have been as mothers to boys and girls along the way...teachers and nurses.

NOW REFRESH US with a fresh encounter with Christ, the Life-Giver.

Send each of us back to our daily tasks reflecting His love and His singleness of purpose. Give to each of us the gift of adventurous faith. In the name and spirit of Christ, we offer this prayer on this Sunday in May.

Remembering how the gift of the Holy Spirit touched those early followers of Christ, we say 'amen'.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, May 9, 1993

GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We greet the visitors in the congregation this morning...delighted you've joined us here to help us celebrate Mother's Day! Be free in the sharing...fill out a visitor card or sign one of the Guest Books...join us downstairs for coffee, if time permits. Come and worship with us....come, work with us, too, in the outreach...
- B. Doing the Lord's work here at this busy corner of God's Kingdom for many years...since 1837. We like to say to new friends that we minister here in the NAME OF CHRIST, and it is in His loving spirit that we greet all of you.
- C. Be sure to wear your name tags....make at least two new friends! Greet, too, the young men from Regis High School...9th graders from Regis on a field trip to a Protestant Church. Paper is due Tuesday, the 11th...welcome you.

PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Let me focus on our parish concerns...first, pick up a copy of our May news sheet...in the narthex or downstairs. Review the announcements in your bulletin...noting the "Hounds" meeting on Tuesday. Aldersgate Class on Wednesday. New friends always most welcome.
- B. Thanks to those who worked hard yesterday to bring about another successful Rummage Sale....proceeds go to the work of the United Methodist City Society...for Camp Olmstead....scholarship for city children to have a week or 10 days away from the city in the summer. Yesterday's receipts totalled: \$ _____.
- C. Let's take a look at what will happen next Sunday.
 1. Bake Sale III...benefit of church picnic. June 19th
 2. A trip to the Shark Bar...for those who can...following the coffee hour. Amsterdam Avenue, West 74th Street area. Our own Michael Vann runs it...
 3. Celebrating the baptism of Bjorn Victor Swarting.... Nov. 17th
 4. Also, we shall receive new members in to the church... some 20 people are leaning in the direction of strengthening their tie with our church through the formal commitment of membership. There may be others who would like to be included...mention it to me at the door or coffee hour and I'll follow up with a note or a call to you.
- D. Our May special appeal for the 7 Health Care Agencies of our Methodist NYAC "peaks" today...we usually respond with a gift of \$ 400...envelopes are in the pews...will be there throughout the month of May and I hope you will respond with a gift...

PEOPLE CONCERNS

- A. Several people concerns....I see that Cory Abernathy and Brett Little are here today...coming over from Brooklyn....they were married here a year ago. Wonderful to see them. Love you both.

- B. Several of you have asked me about the names of two people we have been lifting up in our prayers on a Sunday morning since late January...."Doris, wife of Jay". They are with us today... live upstate in Clifton Park, suburb of Schenectady...active in the UM Church where our friend, David Giles, was pastor....Doris is here undergoing treatment at Sloane Kettering. Will be here in our city for several weeks...husband, Jay, an engineer is with Doris....Doris and Jay Dunkleberg....get to know them and surround them with some love and support as they go through a difficult time...

OFFERING

- A. Jesus said:

"It is more blessed to give than it is to receive". In this spirit, let us worship God with our....