

**Babette's Feast**  
**Good Friday – April 7, 2023**

On Good Friday, I like to simply tell a story for my homily. This story is called Babette's Feast. It was written in 1958 by Danish author Isak Dinesen.

Babette is a refugee woman who, after living in Paris for many years, flees France and settles in a small town in Denmark. She finds herself working for two elderly sisters, working in their home as a housekeeper and cook.

These two sisters are well known in their small town because their father founded the local church.

Babette lives and works for these two sisters for 14 years, cooking and cleaning for them, in exchange for room and board. Babette becomes known in the small town and gains everyone's respect over time. She is one of the few people who gets along with everyone. All over town, there is mistrust, bickering, suspicion, boredom with stale rituals, and general ill-will between townspeople.

For those fourteen years, Babette never hears from any relatives in France except for once a year, when she receives a lottery ticket from a relative in Paris. It is the only connection to her former life.

One year, Babette is stunned when she wins the lottery and receives 10,000 francs, a small fortune. As it happens, the town is planning a celebration for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the sisters' father, who founded the church. Babette, being a cook and now having received this lump of money, offers to prepare a feast for the celebration.

Well, shipments of food start to arrive. Some live animals are even shipped in and delivered to Babette as she plans the meal. Everyone starts to wonder what they've agreed to. The sister worry that enjoying this luscious meal being planned must be sinful, since worldly pleasure and enjoyment are frowned upon. So the sisters and the others in the town secretly agreed to eat the feast that Babette prepares, but they will not show any sign of enjoyment or delight.

Finally, the anniversary celebration arrives, and the feast is served. Babette has pulled out all the stops. There are pastries and caviar, soup and wine, quail, cheeses, truffle sauce, delicious salad, exotic fruits, and cakes. It is, without a doubt, the finest meal any of the townspeople have ever tasted.

One single guest arrived unexpectedly and takes part in the feast. He is unaware of the townspeople's pledge not to show any sign of enjoyment, and this man starts raving about the wonderful food and drink, how sumptuous and delightful it all is!

With his words, the other guests cannot help but start to comment on the delectable food they are enjoying. Slowly, over the many courses of the meal, the people begin to talk and smile and joke and even laugh. Slowly, their ill will and suspicions start to crumble, wrongs are forgiven, and

people speak to others whom they haven't talked to in years. Slowly, over the table, fellowship and trust grow.

What a gift it can be to share a meal together.

When the grand feast is over, the two sisters thank Babette for the meal that has fed both their bodies and their spirits. Babette reveals that she used to be a world-renowned chef at the most exclusive restaurant in Paris, where a meal for 12 cost 10,000 francs.

The two sisters are stunned. They ask their beloved cook and housekeeper whether she will now leave and return to France to resume her old life, now that she is rich. Babette tells the sisters that she spent her entire fortune on the feast, so now that she is poor again, she will continue to live with and work for the two sisters. The small town will be her home for the rest of her life.

One of the sisters tearfully says to Babette in the final words of the story, "Oh, how you will enchant the angels!"

Isak Dinesen. *Babette's Feast and Other Stories*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1958.

*Babette's Feast* is, in some ways, a tragic story. Couldn't Babette have served a slightly less grand meal, saved some of the money, and moved back to Paris? Surely the same effect could've been achieved with a smaller feast, couldn't it?

But the act of love is wholehearted. It is prodigal, wasteful even, given with one's whole being. Love does not hold back.

Couldn't Jesus have toned down his rhetoric just a bit? Couldn't he has been just a little less public about healing the leper, the blind men, the bleeding woman? Couldn't he has come down from the cross? Surely, the same effect could have been achieved?

But love is wholehearted. It is prodigal, wasteful, given with one's whole being. Love does not hold back. Jesus, our savior, does not hold back.

Amen.