NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

It all tastes like love

Fran Rossi Szpylczyn | Aug. 28, 2012 Soul Seeing

Jennie and Darlene are arranging name tags on a folding table in front of the church. "Be my first?" I ask them. Mom and daughter beam. I take my first picture on this special day at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Glenville, N.Y. I'm Fran, the church office manager. It's a madcap job, but somebody's got to do it.

I snap a nursing home van as it pulls to the curb. Joan and Pam help old folks in wheelchairs move down the lift as if they were all on a children's ride at the parish carnival. Father Jerry in a white chasuble comes out to greet them. Everyone is as expectant as the biblical Elizabeth when she greeted the young Mary. I click away like Diane Arbus in a sunny mood. The elderly and infirm, along with anyone who wants to be healed, are here to be blessed.

Our twice-yearly anointing Mass will soon begin.

I take a long shot of the Explorers, Jettas and Corollas lined up politely in the parking lot like ambassadors from the United Nations. I snap Rachel, the pastoral care director and coordinator of the event, as she embraces our elderly Mary whose coat is as pink as cotton candy. Other greeters stand at the curb of the church and share hugs and handshakes and hand out worship aids. My camera captures the young and the old, the fit and the feeble, the happy and the weary. I hope the photos will form a collage of one body of Christ: a portrait of bodies and souls, broken and whole, immaculately re-conceived and re-membered in this church on this day. No one will be ignored, left out or cast aside. The entire body will know that whatever happens to one of them happens to all of them, and that what happens to all happens to each.

I blend with the others inside the church and take a picture of the widow Jan who treads up the aisle. Her eyesight is failing, but she is determined. Helping her into a pew, I introduce her to Bob and Eileen, a couple who always manifests cheerfulness despite life's challenges. A photo of these three will show the beautiful unity in the diversity of our parish body.

The procession begins. The congregation sings as one: "Gather us in, the blind and the lame!" Gnarled and shaking hands make the sign of the cross as the liturgy begins. Everyone listens. We are like children at story time. We hear scripture passages about healing that assure us of the promise of Christ.

When it's time for the anointing, Father Jerry approaches a row of wheelchairs parked in front of the altar. He bows, anointing each person with chrism. A man in his 80s weeps; his aid daubs at his tears with a tissue. I pray that my camera captures the compassion I see with my soul.

Fathers Jerry and Leo move from pew to pew, bearing oil and blessings. Leo anoints Rose, her eyes closed, her upturned palms extended in a gesture of giving and receiving. Ed is so tall that Jerry must reach up to him. His wife, Ann, is the opposite, and Jerry smiles as he stoops to anoint her.

I put down my camera. Father Jerry's thumb marks a cross on my forehead. When he blesses my palms, the pressure of the crosses traced into each one makes me feel woozy. Without my camera to protect me, I feel vulnerable. I am broken, too. My legs and arms work, my eyes focus, there is no arthritis in my hands, but I need healing, too.

"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!"

I follow everyone to the parish hall for another kind of banquet. Fran, Anne and other parish nurses have put out a feast of egg, chicken and tuna salad sandwiches. It all tastes like love.

The soundtrack of a community in delight spreads through the room as everyone eats and talks. Father Jerry moves from table to table, leaving a wake of contentment. My camera clicks away as he chats with a spry and playful Clara. Emily who knits us slippers listens in and I photograph her, too. Senior citizen George is with Father Leo but he turns his head to smile into my lens like George Clooney as I walk by. I feel like a cameraman in a Fellini movie. The sounds of heaven on Earth fill the room with joyful noise.

We depart greater than when we arrived. We are the body of Christ, broken and restored, dying and rising, reconceived and remembered, here and now, once and forever.

[Fran Rossi Szpylczyn is a writer, blogger and social networker. She is studying at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry. You can explore her work by visiting her blog, There Will Be Bread (blog.timesunion.com/bread).]

Source URL (retrieved on *06/19/2013 - 17:07*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/soul-seeing/it-all-tastes-love