

Homily For the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year A

St. Peter's Sun. 12:00 & 5:00 PM Masses - August 2, 2020

Isaiah 55:1-3 "You that have no money. Come, buy and eat. Listen so that you may live"

Psalms 145:8-18 "You open your hand to feed us ... The Lord is near to all who call on him in truth."

Rom 8:35,37-39 "Who will separate us from the love of Christ. Nothing in all creation. "

Matt 14:13-21 "He looked to heaven, blessed, broke the loaves, gave them to the disciples to distribute"

How Much Is Enough

Introduction

You have likely heard the jokes about food and hunger. There is Covid-19, the number of pounds everyone has gained. If we weren't meant to have midnight snacks, why is there a light in the refrigerator? The fridge is the perfect example of what matters is on the inside.

For many of us, life is at least OK. A certain portion may be hard, some more than others. But, most are doing OK, even with restrictions on our lives. We frequently hear about how the people of Israel were having some hardship. They were limited in their freedom, not because of a virus, although I suppose a conquering army would seem like a bad disease. They were mostly not very well off, again at least in part because of extra taxes paid to Rome. We complain about our tax dollars not being spent properly. The tax the Jews paid to Rome was to keep an oppressive army presence and to build up the coffers of a foreign power.

But these things are not the reason the people went out in the wilderness to be in the presence of Jesus. There was just something about him that touched the longing in their hearts. Thousands of people at the same time recognized that they were hungry for something.

There are all kinds of hunger. The first one we think of, naturally, is physical hunger. Hunger reminds us of the need to care for our bodies.

Physical Hunger and Thirst:

Whatever the reasons they tracked Jesus down, in the process they naturally became physically hungry. I'm certain that, as the afternoon went on, people must have started thinking about food and whether they should be doing something about supper.

We found out a little about what happens when we worry that there might be an interruption to the food supply. We had to be assured that lockdown requirements were not going to prevent us from buying food. There was a mild panic in the air and it made us worry about what would happen if there isn't enough food or toilet paper.

The disciples of Jesus were focused on what was missing. All they could see is the lack and their limitations. This is all we have. To Jesus they said: Send the people away. Let them take care of themselves at the local 7-11 or Safeway. They were asking the same question most of us ask: Will there be enough? Especially, will there be enough for us? That's the question we carry around in our hearts and minds: Will there be enough for us? Will there be enough food, fuel, air, livable space on the planet.

The first two readings tell us that God knows our questions: Thus says the Lord: Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. And you that have no money, come, buy and eat! But be careful that you are not spending what you have on that which is not really food and will not really satisfy.

The miracle of Jesus multiplying food looks back to similar miracles in the Old Testament. But no prophet ever fed 15,000 to 20,000 people with five bread sticks and a half eaten can of sardines.

Mental and Psychological Hunger:

Even though people were fed a full meal, they followed Jesus because of their hope for something to hang onto, for a deeper hope. Today, the wilderness is the internet. I don't think there is any doubt that most of us are not just doing essential things in those hours on the computer. We are out in the vast universe

of information podcasts and entertainment and social media trying to connect somehow. We are trying to figure out a happy ending to the sad story most of us tell ourselves, that we are just not good enough in some way. As one writer put it, it's like a stone in your shoe that you don't take the time to remove.

Mindfulness is very big today. Breathe. Be in the present moment. Affirm yourself consistently. Let go of what limits you. This morning, I got a daily mindfulness reflection for the day from Eckhart Tolle, who is called a spiritual teacher. His suggestion for my reflection on this Sunday, the day we celebrate the Lord's resurrection? Life is the dancer and you are the dance. That's what I get to hang onto for my hunger if I look to Eckhart Tolle to feed me.

But Jesus' heart was moved with pity for the crowds. He had just heard about the violent murder of his cousin, John the Baptist, by Herod. He was grieving and trying to find a quiet place to grieve. Yet the hunger and heartache and longing of the crowds supersedes his own sense of loss.

Spiritual Hunger i.e. the hunger for love:

Spiritual hunger goes even deeper than the psychological hunger. St. Paul describes it in terms of the divine love. Is there anything that can separate us from the love of God? Nothing! No physical thing, no illness or tragedy or trial, not even what we are going through. Hurts from our past, even our childhood, attempt to wrench us away from that love, regardless of whether we live long or die early.

But our spirits need to be fed, just like our bodies. The Word of God is that nourishment, not possessions. We have heard this a thousand times, haven't we? The Gospel acclamation tells us: Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Today is a new day to turn to God. Jesus was totally forsaken and abandoned on the cross, but ultimately was not separated from the love of God who raised him up. Nothing we will ever experience will be worse than that, regardless of how it seems.

Atheism today represents a loss of a sense of the loving and creative power. What a tragedy that so many have become isolated from the spiritual nourishment that God wants to provide, but he cannot, or will not, force us to eat.

Sacramental Hunger:

Related to spiritual hunger, I believe we have a sacramental hunger, a desire for permanent and faithful commitment. This is what is reflected in the marriage vows: I promise to be true to you, in good times and in bad times, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.

The Lord's main attributes, expressed in the scriptures today: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in love, good to all, compassionate. The words merciful and compassionate derive from the Hebrew word for womb. Hence the Lord has a motherly tenderness for the child of her womb. That's his covenant with us.

The miracle of the feeding looks forward to the institution of the Eucharist. Both events take place in the evening, those attending recline to eat, Jesus performs the same actions and in the same order (took, blessed, broke, gave).

Lastly, Jesus hands the broken loaves to the same recipients, the disciples, the first priests of the New Covenant. They are the ones who feed the people with the miraculous bread. Now, in the person of Christ, the priest will also take, bless, break and give this food to the people.

God alone truly satisfies our hunger:

When Jesus provides that meal for that multitude, he is fulfilling Isaiah 55 and Psalm 145 and most importantly he is fulfilling the human desire of our hearts. Only God satisfies. Ultimately, nothing else satisfies us enough.

God is always working with a people (us) who feel we are enough on our own. We think we can solve the environmental crisis, the food crisis, the racism crisis, the corona virus crisis. There is total amnesia about Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement. It was rooted and inspired by Jesus Christ, not by any purely human capacity for love and peace. Without God, there will never be enough love to overcome racism.

Jesus Christ Is Enough Feeds Us With Himself:

The richest and most satisfying food is Jesus himself. The Lord is near to all who call on him, **to all who call on him in truth**. What is truth, Pilate said, while he was getting ready to condemn Jesus to death. And truth himself was standing there in front of him.

We do not need to ask how much we owe for the freedom of God's children. Jesus bought our freedom from sin. How much money would this cost? As it says in the ads, it priceless. We had nothing with which to purchase such a gift. But he gave it to us.

Today's passage from Isaiah is read every year at the Easter Vigil. The prayer just before it says: "What the saints of old never doubted would come to pass, the Church has now seen fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Because Jesus Christ is enough, so are you and I IN HIM. Without him, five loaves and two fish is enough for one person's lunch. With him, it's enough to feed 15,000. Outside of Jesus, we can never DO enough, HAVE enough, BE enough. With him, life is transformed into a satisfaction for all of the deepest hungers we long to have satisfied.

Call To Action

What is it that makes life worth living? Eat what is good: physically - basic healthy food. Spiritually, it is the Word of God and the Eucharist: bread and wine taken, blessed, broken, given, if not in person, then in spiritual communion.

Praising God must be your heart beat. Thanking Jesus for his blood must be your pulse. Coming back to the Lord must be your constant action, your refrain.

It takes 22 seconds to wash hands and to say the Lord's Prayer. Your hands will be clean and so will your heart. On this Lord's Day, give the world's solutions a rest. Let your computer and phone screens go silent long enough to ask Jesus to feed you.

Whatever we have is enough. If we give it to Jesus, he is ready to provide food for a whole world full of hungry people. Our little offering is not a problem for God. It is not a limitation. That's why we bring a little bit of bread and wine to the altar. He transforms that little gift into himself and gives it back to us as our spiritual food, as our assurance that we won't lack anything.