

The Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Homily ~July 31, 2011

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

“All you who are thirsty, come to the water! Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Why spend your money for what is not bread? Your wages for what fails to satisfy?”

A walk in any shopping mall will show that we Americans are well fed when it comes to our stomachs, but what we don't see are the starved and the malnourished souls within these bodies of ours. What you won't see are those who have hidden hungers—hungers dealing with self-acceptance and respect, hungers for love and lives that matter. The same thing would be true if you observed people in a bar or lounge. They thirst. They thirst for love, for a life of meaning.

Years ago, a famous English poet, T. S. Eliot, wrote a magnificent poem he entitled “The Wasteland.” It was a devastating look into our present day culture. He showed us how we are spiritually living in a modern desert—a wasteland—a deserted place. Eliot was echoing the cry of Isaiah that we heard in the First Reading today: *“Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy?”*

So Jesus took his disciples out into a deserted place, a place of human loneliness, hunger and thirst. Hungry and thirsty people followed him out there. When the day was getting long, his disciples told him the obvious: “Jesus, they are hungry. Send them out of here.” Jesus' response was, *“Feed them yourselves.”*

As his modern day disciples, we need to recognize what Jesus is saying here: Be bread for the hungry. Do we feel the malnourished spirits of those around us and within? Most likely we are to reply now as the disciples did then: “Jesus, all we're got are five measly barley loaves and two fish. What good is that in the face of all that has to be done?”

You and I live amongst the shattered dreams of the last two centuries. We have had material progress beyond anything that people before us ever imagined. But let's be honest. Spiritually we hunger; spiritually we thirst. Look around and see how many have turned to gurus, psychics, and New Age offerings. Pop-psych religions abound. In addition, even in the spirit of it all, many lead lives of quiet desperation.

What should be done? What should you and I do? Here are a couple of thoughts to run by you.

The first thing we need to do is to quiet down, to quiet down and slow the rush and to seek the Lord in prayer. Our first response should be to turn off our cell phones, our iPads, all of our electronic gizmos that fill us with nothing but noise. We need to take a lesson from Jesus and take time out to hear the silence. Are we simply too busy or perhaps, to be up front, do we fear the silence of prayer? Perhaps when we pray, when we are quiet, we are filled with all these self-accusations and so in our shame, we avoid being close to God. But, friends, we need to remember. We need to remember that God offers himself to us in the midst of our failures, our sins, our brokenness, in the emptiness of our hunger.

Secondly, in addition to praying, we should take God up on his great invitation to be fed by him. Imagine, God offers himself to us. He offers himself to us here in Holy Communion. What an awesome privilege. Here we come in union with the Lord of Life. Here we receive the food that satisfies the hungers of our deepest hearts.

I'm saddened that so many of our fellow Catholics are settling for the new normal and they are putting going to Sunday Mass on the same level as something to do when there's nothing better to choose from.

On the other hand, I'm really gladdened by so many of you who are so faithful, week after week, no matter what. Whether it is a good day or a snowy day, you are here like clockwork. I'm also gladdened and thrilled by the number of people who come to daily Mass. The daily Mass is a shorter version of what we do here every week; but it is just what a person needs to not only get through a day, but to make that day God's day. I'm told that in Florida every morning the Masses are packed. What a beautiful turnout. What a testimony to others who are there.


My dream is that we will have so many people coming to daily Mass we'll have to move out of our little chapel, our "upper room" that holds 75, and come here to the "larger room" where there is space for everybody. As we come to union with God, we become him whom we receive.

One of my favorite times in the Holy Land is to go to the very place where the miracle of the loaves and fishes happened, a little place called Tabgha. Since the time of the miracle, the Benedictines have built a chapel, and it is a must on our

pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On the wall of the chapel is a mosaic that is over twelve hundred years old and has a picture of the loaves and fishes. It has the fish arranged around the basket; but in the basket itself, there are only four loaves of bread. We hear in every one of the Gospels that there were five loaves. What happened to the fifth loaf? Did someone take it? Did someone sell it? Actually, we who look at the mosaic are the fifth loaf. We who receive the Bread of Life become the Bread of Life. As you and I come to Communion and receive the Bread of Life, we are called to become bread for the hungry.

Jesus is here to give us the Bread of Life, not so we can keep it all to ourselves, but so that we can feed countless numbers of those around us who are looking for the same thing every one of us is looking for—a life of meaning, a life of purpose, and a life lived in closeness with God who put us on this earth for a reason. After all, he is the one who will do the feeding. All we have to do is receive him, come to union with him, share his food, share his compassion, share his tender loving mercy, and become whom we receive. If you and I don't do that, those in the world, ourselves included, will continue to go hungry.

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