

3rd Monday of Easter “What Do You Hunger For Most”
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We have recently launched into the Bread of Life discourse in John chapter 6. There is no better theological treatment on the Eucharist in all of the Gospels than what we find in this chapter so it may be worthwhile to sit down and prayerfully read through it again. We are in the second of the series, since we started this at daily mass on Saturday. To bring us up to speed, John chapter 6 begins with the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Jesus “takes, breaks and gives” five barley loaves and a couple of fish and feeds the five thousand present. We talked about how God desires to feed his people, no small thing, and how God’s grace is superabundant. What happened next? It says, the people were so amazed they wanted to carry Jesus off and make him king. Jesus, knowing their hearts, flees from them. Why? The people simply didn’t get it! And that is where the Gospel story begins today.

You have to understand that the people in Jesus’ day wanted a savior. But not in the way God was going to deliver. The people wanted a new King David, a political messiah, someone who would liberate Israel from the Romans. God, however, was not going to answer that prayer. Jesus does not want to be our political savior. The tyranny Jesus wants to liberate us from is not the Romans or any earthly power. Jesus wants to liberate us from sin and death. So instead of sitting on the earthly throne that the people were beginning to construct for him, Jesus goes back to his little house in Capernaum across the Sea of Galilee. And so, once more, the people follow him across the Sea and the question Jesus asked them is: What are they hungry for?

That is what the Gospel is asking us today: what do we hunger for the most in life? St. Augustine perhaps answered this question best at the beginning of his Confessions. He said that we are made for God and so our hearts are restless until they rest in God. And so, Jesus tells us in our Gospel reading to stop working for food that perishes. And to be clear, there is nothing wrong about wanting a good paycheck to take care of our families. And the ability to provide food for one’s family is very important. And, for the record, there is nothing wrong with wanting to buy nice things from time to time. The people who make these things have kids with braces too. It is just that, at the end of the day, there is something lacking about all of it. Everything I buy eventually turns to dust. Everything I do in this life will eventually be forgotten by others. The only thing we will ever find to be truly satisfying in life is a relationship with God which begins with a relationship with Jesus.

This relationship is of course nurtured through prayer, spiritual reading, charity that compels us to serve our neighbor and being fed by the sacraments of the Church. These things do not perish. The Eucharist is food that leads to eternal life. Even if we can’t receive communion physically, we can do so spiritually. And it is so important. God can truly touch us if we turn our hearts to him. This is what we hunger for most. We hunger for God’s touch. Don’t we? Just as the Hebrews were fed manna in the desert on their way to the Promised Land, we are fed the Eucharist as we make our way through the desert of life to the eternal life that awaits.

Studying the Bread of Life Discourse is beautiful and appropriate during the Easter Season. It can also kind of sting because so many in our community cannot physically receive communion right now. That reality hurts. I can't tell you how many times I have offered communion to people recently who simply burst into tears when I offered Jesus to them. We are really and truly living in difficult times. On the other hand, these times are forcing us to discern what we think is most important right now. And that is where the Gospel asks us today. The Gospel asks us to consider perhaps most fundamental question we have in life: what do you hunger for most?