

3rd Thursday of Easter “Longing for the Bread of Life”
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April 30, 2020

This week we have been exploring the question, “What do we hunger for most?” That seems to be the essential question posed by John chapter 6. As a brief recap of where we have been, the Bread of Life discourse began with Jesus leading a large group of people into a deserted place where they eventually became hungry. Jesus performed the miraculous sign of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish, everyone had their fill and they were so impressed with Jesus that they were ready to carry him off to make him King. “He fills our bellies, let’s make him king!” Jesus retreats away from them to be alone because the people had totally missed the point. He was not interested in becoming our political savior. He is interested in saving us from the power of sin and death. The next day began with Jesus returning home to Capernaum, the people of course followed him and so Jesus asks them, “Why do you work for food that perishes?” Why do that? Why spend so much effort on obtaining things that turn to dust? It is the same question as: “What do you hunger for most?” And this wasn’t an admonishment of having a good job or providing good things for our family, it just that so much that we hunger for materially in this world in fact eventually turns to dust. Jesus asks us, “what do you hunger for most” and the correct answer is God. Like St. Augustine, our hearts are restless until the rest in God so, whether we are conscious of it or not, we hunger for union with God more than anything else that this world has to offer when we get right down to it.

There are two moments in the Gospel reading today I would like to focus on. I think that is a pretty good idea unless you packed a lunch. The first is this. Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die.” As an aside, when you compare all the gospels, it is interesting, and somewhat entertaining, that in the Gospel of Mark Jesus is constantly telling people, “Shhh. Don’t tell anyone that I am the Son of God”. In the Gospel of John however it is almost like Jesus is standing on top a car with a megaphone and proclaiming, “Yup. I’m God”. What Jesus is saying here is, all the miracles involving bread in the past, like the manna in the desert to feed the Hebrews on their forty year pilgrimage to the Promised Land or the angel of the Lord feeding Elijah bread at a moment in his life when he was the most discouraged and ready for death, all of it, points to Jesus. While everything else in life decays and eventually turns to dust, Jesus is saying that he is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. Once more God reveals himself as intimately interested in the human race, not aloof, not distant. So much so, God himself wants to even become our food for the journey. And this leads us to the second moment.

The second moment is at the end of this Gospel reading when Jesus says, “...the bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world.” People wonder why the Last Supper accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus on the institution of the Eucharist whereas in John’s Gospel the emphasis is the washing of the feet. The reason for this is, in part, the Gospel of John’s understanding of the Blessed Sacrament is already covered in full detail in this chapter. The word “flesh” here is striking because the Greek that is employed is “sarx”. John could have used all kinds of other words that could mean body, but the word sarx can only mean one thing....flesh. What this means is, Jesus himself, and therefore the Early Church, all believed that

Jesus is truly present in the Holy Eucharist. For them, and for us, the Eucharist is not a metaphor. The Eucharist is not a symbol in the way we typically use that word. The Eucharist is real.

As hard as these days are, what makes these days even harder is that so many of our parishioners are unable to receive Jesus in Holy Communion right now. This is why we emphasize the Spiritual Communion prayer at these online masses so that we can at least commune with Jesus spiritually. However, it is clear I think to everyone that the Spiritual Communion Prayer, while very beneficial especially in these times, is still no substitute for receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. When we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we are allowing God himself to physically touch us, to feed us, and to transform us. And so, as we long for the day when this crisis will be over, I do believe that these times are opening our hearts to consider more deeply and more passionately than ever the theme we have been exploring this week, “What do we hunger for most?”