

HOMILY SUNDAY 17 – B

“Jesus Is The Answer”

(2 Kg 4:42-44; Ps 145; Eph 4:1-6; Jn 6:1-15)

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What are you hungering for? Are you dissatisfied with life?

Put your faith in Jesus, who is the answer to all our needs.

According to author Peter Herbeck, there are 315 men living in death row in Luzira prison, Kampala, Uganda. Living in dire conditions, they are waiting execution. But there is something different about this prison. The usual violence and perversion is absent. Instead there is charity, respect, kindness, a hunger for holiness and a passion for Jesus Christ.

It seems that years earlier a warden encouraged the inmates to have bible study, and members of Prison Fellowship International came to support them and lead them into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. One by one they began to change, to find hope in their hopelessness. Realizing that justice demands they pay for their crimes, they confessed their sins and helped each other face the reality of their imminent death. Instead of despair, however, they are full of praise, because they are waiting not so much to die, as to see Jesus Christ.

There is some irony here, because in the world today, many people who think they are free, who are not in prison, do not have what these prisoners have found. There is much spiritual hunger in our world, unrest, dis-ease, dis-satisfaction.

Dr. Glasser speaks of “unmet needs” as the root of much of our unrest. It seems that we always want more, that something always seems to be missing. Ron Rolheiser, in his writing, says that our lives are an unfinished symphony, that we always have some incompleteness in our lives. Books are written with such titles as “Father – Daughter Dance.” Some call this phenomenon a “hole in our soul.”

Those who have no faith are condemned to trying to fill that void with all kinds of false gods – alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling and control to name a few. This cuts across all social classes. Politicians who make high salaries are charged with corruption. Professionals are caught stealing from grocery stores. Nations fight one another in the name of religion. Young people get trapped in fads and fashions. The end result is either addiction or idolatry – the worship of false gods.

The gospel today gently reminds us of the inadequacy of these efforts to save ourselves. When Jesus asks how the apostles could feed the crowd, Andrew is quick to point out three loaves and two fish are pathetically unable to meet the need. And that is so true - on our own we can never satisfy the deep hunger that dwells in the human heart.

The gospel then clearly demonstrates the answer to the human condition – faith in Jesus Christ. He commands them to sit, takes the paltry food supply, blesses it and it multiplies to feed the multitude with 12 baskets left over (symbolizing all of the tribes of Israel).

The message is clear – Jesus alone is the answer to our deepest needs. It is also important, as this account is found in all four gospels. It mirrors the Sermon on the Mountain, where Jesus fed the multitude with his Word. There is a hint here of a New Passover, a new Exodus, a new Moses. Jesus is in control, acts with authority, knows what he is doing, and he himself distributes the bread. Plenty of grass reminds us of Psalm 23 – where the Lord is our shepherd.

Unfortunately, the people do not understand the true significance of this miracle, and react by wanting to proclaim Jesus king, a political ruler. They still mistake fullness of life with material reality, such as riches, power and control. They are not yet ready to let Jesus into their lives as their Lord and Saviour, Redeemer and healer. To avoid being identified with this false, popular desire for that kind of pseudo-salvation, Jesus withdraws to a deserted place by himself.

What about us? Do we understand, believe and live in genuine freedom, or are we still caught in the illusion of trying to save ourselves? Our society today, in its false pride and mistaken self-sufficiency, tries to make Jesus just one way out of many, to make truth relative, to put forward many possible saviours. No wonder we are faced with so much negativity, confusion, addiction, suicide and social problems.

The choice is clear. Jesus is the bread of life, the only one who can satisfy the deepest yearnings of the human heart. Our challenge is to respond by placing our complete trust in him, surrendering our will and lives to him. To encounter him is to be transformed into a new creature, as St. Paul reminds us. It is to be forgiven, healed, filled with his Spirit and given a mission to live and minister as he did.

Linda Yamniuk's children take their turn every night making bread in the bread maker, for the next morning. One time her daughter forgot to put in the yeast, and the bread was only a few inches in height. The kids were amazed at the difference that yeast makes in bread making, and Linda was quick to point out that bread without yeast is very much like our lives without the Spirit of God. We need the Spirit of Jesus to make us rise, grow, and live lives to the full.

The Eucharist we celebrate today is our opportunity to be like Andrew, to have faith in Jesus, to see the extra-ordinary in the ordinary; to believe that bread and wine becomes for us the Body and Blood of he who is the Bread of Life for the world. How fortunate we are – what a gift of faith.

So, put your faith in Jesus as the Bread of life; Jesus who is the answer to all our needs, the answer that lasts, and believe in the Eucharist as his way of feeding us spiritually through the Church, empowering us to be the Bread of love for the world.