

August 2, 2020 | 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

[IS 55:1-3](#)

[PS 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18](#)

[ROM 8:35, 37-39](#)

[MT 14:13-21](#)

By Mark Peters

Our readings today begin with something universal and elemental: hunger and thirst. Certainly, people in the time of Isaiah (and later, during the Exile, in the time of “Deutero-Isaiah”) knew far better than us today that food and water could not be taken for granted. A truly hungry or thirsty person can think of little else but how to feed that hunger and slake that thirst.

Now, everyone knows that in this world, “there ain’t no such thing as a free lunch.” Yet what God is offering here is lavish abundance, at no cost at all! It quickly becomes clear that the prophet is seeing what we do not, that “we do not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Augustine put it almost as well: [We are] “made for God, and can find no rest till [we find] rest in him.”

Clearly, the sustenance referred to here is the food of the soul. It’s not just another day of earthly existence on offer, it is the promise of salvation, “the fullness of life” we have now come to associate with “heaven,” in our “afterlife.” But, we see at the end of the first reading that we may not have to wait until death for this heavenly banquet after all – it is tied into the renewal of “the everlasting covenant” between God and us. That covenant is supposed to apply to this earthly life, more so than the next. It is meant to be a foretaste of what life in the heavenly Kin-dom will be – in the here and now.

There is also the recognition, echoed in our Psalm for today, that God gives us “food in due season.” When we are most in need, God is most with us, even if we must ultimately face suffering or failure or death. Therefore, as St. Paul puts it, we needn’t fear anything – neither anguish, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor the sword.

Our readings today culminate in the story of the Loaves and Fishes (the only miracle to appear in all four Gospels). Biblical theologian Mary Healy, in her commentary on Mark, reminds us that this story is immediately preceded by the death of John the Baptist. Herod’s opulent banquet ended in John’s martyrdom; Jesus, by contrast, offers “simple fare, leading to life.”

Healy also observes that, as always, Christ’s disciples fail to perceive as much. They don’t recognize that “deserted places” are where God is often encountered, and in which he has abundantly provided in the past (as with the manna in the desert). They tell Jesus to dismiss the crowds and let them buy their own food, oblivious to the fact that he is fulfilling the promise of Isaiah that God will provide us the most important kind of food, that which money can never buy.

Most importantly, I think, Healy notes that Jesus does not turn “stones into bread” here, as Satan suggested to him in the desert. Rather he begins with what the apostles have to offer. He “miraculously multiplies” their poor offering, establishing “a principle that will bear on all their future apostolic labor.” And considering that the “not counted” woman and children likely made this a crowd of over 20,000, that’s quite a multiplier affect.

That kind of miraculous impact seems to be what is needed in today’s world for Christians who understand Catholic social teaching. Yet we want to say with the apostles, “There are so many to feed, Lord, millions of hungry children and refugees. And surely you don’t expect us to fight racism, stand up for migrants, speak out against war, and challenge those who deny the humanity of the unborn, all by our puny, powerless selves?” Oh, we of little faith!

Perhaps there is a connection between our readings today and the Defund/Divest/Reinvest calls we are hearing from the leaders of Black Lives Matter, and before them, from the corporate responsibility movement and the alternatives to militarism movement. It’s time to ask ourselves why we continue to spend our money on what is not bread, and work so hard for that which fails to satisfy, leaving so little time to work for what will.

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