



The Holy Spirit Province

NEWSLETTER

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FEEDING THE HUNGRY: 16TH SUNDAY B

There are at least three kinds of hunger. There is a hunger for bread, for the food and drink that satisfy physical hunger and nourish physical health and life. There is emotional hunger, a hunger for acceptance and welcome, affirmation and affection from others. And there is spiritual hunger. For Christians, this is a craving for Christ and his company. As a famous song puts it, in the words of St Richard of Chichester, this hunger is a longing 'to see him more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly, day by day,'

Mother Teresa of Calcutta has spelled out well these three kinds of hunger:

Your poverty is greater than ours ... the spiritual poverty of the West is much greater than the physical poverty of the East. In the West, there are millions of people who suffer loneliness and emptiness, who feel unloved and unwanted. They are not the hungry in the physical sense; what is missing is a relationship with God and with each other.

In our gospel today, we meet people who are experiencing those three kinds of hunger. Their greatest hunger is for the company of Jesus, for the enlightenment and truth of his teachings, and the warmth and comfort of his understanding, kindness. and compassion. They are also feeling the pangs of physical hunger and hoping he can relieve those as well.

Looking for a little rest and recreation, Jesus sails away with his friends for the eastern shore of the lake. But seeing where the boat is heading, the crowds hurry along the shore and are already waiting for them at the other side. You can imagine what you and I might have thought and even said about this. Jesus too might easily have felt annoyed and resentful. He might easily have moaned and groaned: 'Why won't they leave us alone for a while? Why won't they let us have a bit of time to ourselves? Why won't they give us just a little peace and quiet? Why won't they stay away? Why won't they?'

But Jesus thinks no such thoughts. He thinks only of them, of their need for him, and for the love and assistance he can provide as their Good Shepherd. Sensing their longing to be with him and seeing so many sick and troubled persons among them, his heart overflows with compassion. And so, he goes from one little group to the other - listening to them, talking to them, comforting them, and healing their physically and mentally sick ones. In this way the longing they have felt to be with him, and their need for acceptance and welcome, affirmation and affection, are satisfied.

All this has much to say to us as the disciples of Jesus in the world today. We must face, first of all, the physical hunger of millions of our fellow human beings. Can we any longer feel indifferent concerning so much conspicuous consumption and so much waste in our Western world, when so many persons are deprived of the necessities of life and are even starving to death? What will Jesus say to us on Judgment Day? Will it be: 'I was hungry, and you gave me food? I was thirsty and you gave me a drink' (Mt 25:35-36)? Or will it be: 'I was hungry and you never gave me any food, I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink' (Mt 25:42-43)?

In the second place, there are all around us so many deprived and lonely people who are craving for even a little bit of affirmation, acceptance, and affection. The widespread problems of so many runaway and homeless children, of drug addiction, of domestic violence, of suicide, are but symptoms of deep unsatisfied longings to be loved and to love. Can you and I be at least a little more sensitive, a little more responsive, a little more active and caring towards so many lost and lonely persons? And will we want Jesus to say to us: 'I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me (Mt 25:36-37)'?

Jesus has identified himself with people in physical, emotional, and spiritual need. To meet them is to meet him. 'In truth I tell you,' he says, 'in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40-41) and 'in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me' (Mt 25:45).

It's the same Jesus whom we meet today in our celebration of the Eucharist, as the Jesus who took pity on the crowd of hungry people on the shore of the lake. He will shortly be nourishing our friendship with him in the signs of bread and wine, to empower us to become more and more like him. And at the end of our celebration of him and his teachings, he will be sending us back into the world as a source of nourishment to others, by reaching out to them with our words and actions of acceptance and welcome, affirmation and affection.

Fed, then, by our holy communion with him, may we do more than ever before to satisfy the physical, emotional, and spiritual hunger of all those needy persons out there, whom God keeps putting on our paths, to nourish them with practical signs of God's own compassionate and caring love.

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