

Homily 17th Sunday Year B

Feeding the Hungry

The desire of God is to feed the hungry. We hear this today in the Old Testament story. We also see it demonstrated in the Gospel by Jesus who *has compassion on the multitude*.

It is not the will of God that anyone be hungry for food, **physically hungry**. Those who try to live according to the teaching and example of Jesus and to imitate him must therefore take some personal action to relieve such hunger wherever we know that it exists.

There is also the hunger of the **heart** – the hunger for love, the need to feel wanted, valued. This is an ache felt by people of all ages, from youngsters through teenage years to the very old.

The reasons can be many and varied, but often it is the self-interest of others that is the cause. Concerned overmuch for our own selves we are unresponsive – even unaware – of those who feel abandoned or rejected.

Such neglect can occur even within families. Our own relatives can be left isolated and unattended – in their own homes, or given over to the charge of institutions and then all but forgotten.

Jesus visited the sick and the bereaved, and gave a welcome to young and old alike. He is our model. All around us are empty hearts needing to be filled with loving-kindness.

There is also the hunger of the **mind**. God calls us to pursue the Truth, to seek answers to unresolved questions; to weigh arguments in the balance, and to seek to do what is right.

It is regrettable that in our society there is so much emphasis on learning only what seems to be *useful* - for ‘practical’ tasks, for ‘earning a living’. There seems to be less appreciation nowadays than there was a generation or more ago of the value of academic inquiry for its own sake. Yet to question and to inquire is to deploy the gift of intellect that God has bestowed upon human beings. To develop this faculty helps us to live aright, in accordance with God’s will. To do so is very much in our best interests.

We surely need to *ponder* on the meaning and purpose of our life, and on how to become happy. The Gospel of Jesus enlightens our minds and reveals the way forward to us. The Gospel teaches us what really matters, what our priorities should be, how we can become fully alive. Jesus offers us the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Then there is the deepest hunger of all – the longing of the **soul**. St Augustine reminds us: *We are made for you, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till we rest in thee*.

The world we live in may give us some delight; the things we acquire may offer us some comfort; our human relationships may provide some consolation and encouragement. All these aspects of our human experience are of importance in our search for personal peace. But there will remain a sense of emptiness within us, an unfilled space, dissatisfaction at the deeper levels of our self, until we open up our hearts and lives to the presence and power of the love of God.

We are 'made for God' – to enjoy such a spiritual relationship, to enter into the Divine Life. So unless we attend on God and seek to move into God's embrace we will never be wholly at peace: *Narcotics cannot still the tooth that nibbles at the soul* (Emily Dickenson).

What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? We can possess everything and still be empty within. And yet, as countless people have discovered in the religious history of all the great world faiths, we can possess nothing and find utter fulfilment in God. As today's Psalm expresses it: *You open wide your hands, you grant the desires of all who live.*

Today we could pray at Mass that all the hungry of our human family be fed - in body, heart, mind and soul. And we commit ourselves once again to play our part in responding to the various needs of our brothers and sisters those both near and far.