

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Isaiah 55:1-3 / Matthew 14:13-21)
02.08.2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are all hungry; we are all thirsty. We hunger for bread and thirst for water obviously! But our hunger and thirst go deeper than that; our hunger and our thirst stem from a deep dissatisfaction within us. We long to be loved and to love, but we don't always succeed in this respect. We were created to live in relationship with one another and yet we feel isolated at times. We are part of the created world and yet we don't always know how to relate to it. We would like to enjoy a long and smooth life but suddenly an unexpected illness assails us, to say nothing of the present covid-19 pandemic... We try to remedy our dissatisfaction by acquiring things, but the truth is that we cannot give to ourselves or buy what will satisfy our existential hunger or our existential thirst. We have to ask for this deeper satisfaction in prayer and prepare ourselves to receive it as a gift from God. The Lord's gift to us is his Word! Only God, through his Word, can truly fulfil our inner hunger and quench our inner thirst. In the first reading, we heard the prophet Isaiah say on God's behalf: "Listen, listen to me (listen to my Word) and you will have good things to eat and rich food to enjoy", that is to say your hunger will be fulfilled and your thirst quenched.

"Jesus took pity on a large crowd and healed their sick". There is a healing power in the Word of God. The Word of God brings us restoration to health which is something we all need, because we are all wounded people. The Word of God can clear us totally of our illness. We have a lot of examples in the gospels where the Word of Jesus (the Word of God made flesh) brings healing: "Be cured! And the leper was cured!", "See, and the blind man saw!", "Walk! And the paralyzed man walked!" Miracles do happen! Today still people are healed here and there.

But, most of the time, the Word of God, the Word of Jesus teaches us how to live with our sickness, how to assume it. The Word of God teaches how to hope and even find peace as we fight against our illness. It happens, for example, that a verse from the Word of God seems to have been written especially for us and our situation today. For this reason we keep it in our heart; we repeat and ruminate its message. This brings us deep peace, even in the midst of a grave illness. This word proves to be a powerful grace of healing. Yes, there is a healing power in the Word of God which is still at work today!

The Word of God is also what can truly satisfy our existential hunger and our existential thirst day after day. We have always to come back to these words of wisdom of the great St Augustine: "Our hearts were made for you, O Lord, and they are restless until they rest in you"! Our hungers and thirsts are signs of our deepest desire which is the desire placed within our hearts by God himself. To expose ourselves day after day to the Word of God and to put it into practice is the way for us to satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst in a non deceptive way. This is not something that we have to do once and for all; this is an unceasing process to which we must have recourse day after day... As we feed our bodies each and every day at regular intervals, so the same way we have to nourish our souls each and every day with the spiritual food which is the Word of God. If not, we shall become hungry and thirsty and will have recourse to the wrong nourishment which will soon reveal itself deceptive.

Our God who speaks to us is a compassionate God. A compassionate God is a God who rejoices with those who rejoice and suffers with those who suffer. Our compassionate God cannot see sick people without wanting to heal them and effectively doing so. He cannot see crowds of people who desire to listen to him without feeding them, not only by speaking to them at some length, but also by giving them bread and fish to eat. The point to be grasped is that the Lord does not separate soul and body. He cares for the whole person of those he meets. Jesus, the Son of God, the Word of God made flesh, is deeply human. Jesus' humanity gives weight to his spiritual teaching.

At the beginning of today's gospel passage which follows the news of the death of St John the Baptist, we see Jesus going to a lonely place, a deserted place, to grieve over the death of John the Baptist, the Precursor. This is another example of Jesus' humanity. We all need a lonely place where we can go to mourn not only the death of our loved ones, but also to mourn the numerous deaths we are called to traverse as part of our spiritual journey. This is not a waste of time and energy; on the contrary this is an indispensable passage, something we need so that we may be restored and life may spring up anew within us.

The proof of the new life that sprang up from Jesus' time of solitude is that when he emerged from the lonely place to which he had retreated he met a large crowd of "five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children". He spoke to them and multiplied loaves and fish to feed them. At the heart of our lives which are made up of many relationships, we also need solitude where we are able to hear the Word of God and allow this Word to satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst. Emerging from this solitude we are better able to nourish others both spiritually and materially.

May the Lord rekindle our love for his Word of life!