

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Eat Something!

I love the readings for this week. All three really mesh together for me. Let's start with Isaiah. The prophet uses the image of a baby nursing. Babies need the best food they can have, the food their mothers' provide. The readings for this Sunday begin with an image that is somewhat embarrassing in modern American society but perfectly natural in most other settings. That is the image of Jerusalem as being a mother nursing her child. In the earthly language of ancient Palestine, the image emphasizes that Jerusalem's breasts are large, filled with milk. We are told to drink fully of the milk of her comfort and nurse with delight at her abundant breasts.

When I read this section of Isaiah, I remembered one of the saddest pictures I have ever seen. It was a picture of a mother and baby in Somalia during one of the horrible famines that plague that section of the world. The mother could not consume enough food for her breasts to produce milk for her baby. She sat there, her eyes glazed over with a suffering beyond imagination. She sat and watched her infant crying and dying of starvation.

That dying baby, that's us without the Lord. That starving child is us when we are not consuming the Word of God.

Isaiah exhorts us, "Nurse and be strong. You have a source of all the nourishment you need. Jerusalem provides the food." From Jerusalem comes the Word of God, the Word of God in Scripture, the Word of God that has become flesh, Jesus Christ.

There are many times in our lives that we all cry out, "I am hungry. I am drained. I am spiritually weak." What do we say to our older children when they are hungry? We say, "Eat something."

"I am hungry," we complain.

"Then eat," the first reading tells us. "Read scripture, let the Word of God work on you."

"But I don't know where to start," we cry. We have bibles. We have the Eucharist. We have everything we need. But we don't take advantage of God's gifts. "Stop staring into the refrigerator, and start eating," the first reading tells us. A good place to start is to read the Sunday readings to prepare for the Lord's Dinner. There are three readings, start on Monday and read the first reading, the second on Tuesday, the Gospel on Wednesday and then start again Thursday with the first reading. On Sunday read all three. Just ask yourself, "what is this reading saying to me."

Another daily practice we can have is reading a few chapters every day of the Gospel for this year's Sunday cycle, *the Gospel of Luke*. Or, perhaps, focus on *the*

Gospel of John, that Gospel that makes an appearance throughout the church year during all three cycles. Here's a great practice: the Bible in a Year podcast with Fr. Mike Schmitz. You can start it at any time. It only takes 20 minutes a day. A year from now, you would have covered the whole Bible. Whatever we do, we need to nurse. We need to get the food we need from Jerusalem's abundant breasts, the Word of God.

In today's Gospel, the seventy-two who had been sent out to proclaim the kingdom return exuberant. You can feel their excitement in the reading. They had such wonderful experiences that they couldn't wait to tell the Lord all about them. Everybody was talking at once. Jesus himself joined right in, "I saw Satan falling like lightning from the sky." Who were these seventy-two? We don't know even one their names. And there is a reason for that. They are us. We are the seventy-two. We are the ones who have nursed on the Word of God and become strong. We are the ones who have become so strong that other's experience the Word of God within us. The Kingdom is proclaimed. Evil is destroyed. The devil falls from the sky.

And we are overwhelmed with joy.

But this joy, this joy is radically different from any other concept of joy we may have. This joy is different in a most shocking way. St. Paul speaks about this joy in today's reading from *Galatians*. His joy, his strength, his boast is our joy, our strength our boast. His joy and our joy is in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is not merely a memory of an event that took place two thousand years ago, that is too simple, too convenient. His joy and our joy is in our sharing the Cross of the Lord. St. Paul says, "I bear the marks of Jesus on my body." This can't be relegated to a discussion on whether or not he received the stigmata. That's too easy, too convenient. No, he and we, are afflicted with the result of following Jesus Christ.

So, we avoid that party where there are drugs and drunks, and that causes pain from those who mock us for not going, but we gladly bear these pains in union with the Cross. Or we avoid a social meeting with someone that our internal radar, our conscience says, "This could go sideways." And this causes us pain because we really like that person. Or we happily give up what we **want** to care for another's **needs**. Just about every one of you parents are doing this or have done this. You happily gave up that boat, that European vacation, that top of the line car that you wanted because your children need a college education. Still, it smarts, but you happily make the sacrifice and bear the marks of the Lord on your body.

And so, we dare to make the decision to be holy, to be separate for the Lord, and people say to us, "Get real." The girls at work, the guys on the business trip, the kids at school, the neighbors, the relatives, all mock us for wanting to be holy. They say, "Get real, everybody is doing this and that. It is the way the world is. Join it."

And we respond, "I am real. I am united to the one true reality, Jesus Christ. He means more to me than anything. His Holiness and His Presence is well worth,

infinitely worth, what it costs, your scorn. I gladly bear the marks of the Lord on my body."

The readings say to us today, "Drink abundantly from the breasts of Jerusalem. Witness the action of God in your lives. Relish in the Power of the Lord working through you, and boast, boast in your sharing in the Cross of Christ."