

5th Sunday of Easter – 2020A

Gospel: Jn 14:1-12 I make reference to verse 18 in the homily.

Research shows that skipping breakfast can have nasty effects on the health of your heart. Although a healthy diet overall is key, it looks like this one meal might just be most critical of all. Mom always said breakfast was the most important meal of the day. It turns out she was right.

According to a study from Mayo Clinic researchers, breakfast is, in fact, the most important meal of the day, at least when it comes to the health of your heart. Moms, doctors and the Mayo Clinic aren't the only ones concerned about heart trouble. So is Jesus. In today's gospel text, Jesus gives his disciples - and us - this clear command: "Let not your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1,).

Now, to be clear, Jesus isn't talking about cholesterol levels or bypass surgeries. No, he's talking about a different kind of heart trouble: the kind that can also be classified as worry, fear, anxiety or stress. The kind of heart trouble that can feel like a loss of hope, a lack of faith, a panic attack or pangs of uncertainty. The kind of heart trouble that keeps you up at night thinking about things like: Am I going to catch the corona virus? Is my elderly parent going to succumb to this disease? If they reopen the schools will the children end up spreading Covid 19 thus causing a new spike in people infected? What will normal be like if and when we ever get back to normal?

Perhaps already today you've had palpitations of worry or fear because someone you know has been taken ill or has died? That's the kind of heart trouble Jesus is talking about. It's the kind we've all experienced. It's the kind of heart trouble, faith trouble and lack-of-peace-trouble that tends to run rampant in our lives.

It's clear that heart trouble - of the physical, emotional and spiritual kind - is a major threat to our well-being as followers of Christ. Thanks to good research, we know a good breakfast will help our arteries. But what about our hearts of faith, our worries and anxieties? What about those gnawing fears and gnawed fingernails? Let's be honest: Is it even possible, as followers of Jesus in this extremely screwed-up world, to heed his command and have an untroubled heart? Really? Sure it is.

According to God's Word - according to Jesus himself, in fact - having an untroubled heart of faith all comes down to what you're feeding that heart. Just as an omelet makes a difference physically, what you're feasting on or depriving yourself of makes all of the difference spiritually.

Ask any doctors, and they'll tell you there are two keys to physical well-being: It all comes down to a good diet and regular exercise. Neglect either of those, and you're headed for trouble. The same is true with your heart of faith. It must be well-fed and well-run in order to be strong and healthy. Take another look at Jesus' words. He says, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me" (v. 1,). Jesus tells us the key to "heart health" as one of his followers is to trust in and feast on him. What our hearts need to stay healthy is regular nourishment from Christ and an active life of following Christ.

Far too many followers of Christ have heart trouble stemming from the fact that their lives involve no regular consumption of Christ and no actual exercise of their faith in Christ. As a result, they're unable to withstand the anxieties of life that come up daily. Starving for a sense of direction that comes from Christ in his Word or craving some lasting peace that can come only from standing on his promises, we wind up looking for nourishment in all the wrong places.

We skip the spiritual meals in favor of earthly solutions. Later, we binge on earthly things, believing they'll bring us God-things. For example, we might religiously consume cable news, thinking the talking heads will give us lasting wisdom in this crumbling world. We may begin obsessing

about our physical appearance and calorie count, wrongly believing that regaining control over our bodies will give us control over our startled souls.

Meanwhile, our unfed hearts of faith are going through prolonged periods of disengaged laziness. Our troubled hearts of faith that were once tested in tough conversations with unbelieving friends in college and put to use through prayer in times of stress now sit on the couch and consume nothing but junk. No wonder we feel ill-equipped for the worries of life!

When it comes to our hearts of faith, it's about just two things. Our troubled hearts need to be fed with Christ and exercised in a life of following him. Remember Christ's own words immediately following the command that our hearts be trouble-free. Five times - five times in just two verses - Jesus uses the words 'I' or 'me.' It's nothing less than a plea for us to anchor our hearts in the hope that he gives and the work he'll one day return to complete.

So how do we feed our hearts the power of Christ? It comes down to being connected to the promises of his Word, found in the Scriptures, and the power of his presence, found in his people.

In verse 18, Christ makes a promise, saying, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." Quite often, when our hearts are troubled and we feel furthest from Christ, it's simply because we are far from the two places - his Word and his people - where he's promised to always be found.

Once your heart of faith is fed with Christ, the essential element is to make sure it's regularly stretched, exercised and put to the test in a lifestyle of relentlessly pursuing Christ. Immediately after telling his disciples to feast on him, Jesus boldly proclaimed that they would be living lives of faith in which they achieved more amazing things than he did! "Truly, truly," said Jesus, "whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these he will do ..." (v. 12.). The disciples needed hearts that were fed with Christ because they'd be thrown into lives of doing incredible, frightening, heart-straining works in the name of Christ.

Could it be that one reason our faith feels so weak is because it doesn't get exercised and tested? What if, rather than avoiding that difficult conversation with a sister-in-law, we prayed for courage, sought God's people for counsel and then approached her in an attempt to reconcile? What if, rather than live in fear of life outside the suburbs and of people who are different from us, we searched God's Word to discover Jesus' heart toward those on the fringes of society? What if we pushed aside inconvenience and ignorance and reached out to the neighbour we barely know? What if, rather than worry about our finances, we trusted Christ to be King over our treasure, set an actual budget and attempted to tithe? What if, rather than feeding our hearts with excuses to stay where we are in life, we took bold steps to train, engage and grow our faith? What if?

Each day, millions of disciples will feel a few shooting pains run through their hearts as their confinement continues, when social distancing becomes more difficult in good weather, and money gets tight because one is out of work. "Let not your hearts be troubled." It's time to heed Christ's call, feed on his Word and begin flexing that faith. If Mom was right about breakfast, then certainly Jesus is right about this. Amen.

Deacon Gerry

