

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary time
August 5, 2018

What is it that you are looking for? The people in the gospel today are looking for Jesus but for all the wrong reasons. They want to see another miracle of multiplying the loaves or changing the water into wine. What are we looking for? Our hopes and our dreams surely include getting away from it all. Having some rest and relaxation. But more particularly we are all looking for greater freedom, liberation from the things that hold us down. We want to be free. But just like the Israelites in the first reading, all's they could do is grumble. They wanted to be back in Egypt where they were held in slavery. At least there they would have something to eat.

What is it that you are looking for? Are you satisfied to be moderately content? One of the groups that I most admire in our community, believe it or not, is Alcoholics Anonymous. I think they represent us all in the struggle for freedom. I've heard stories of alcoholics falling to the depths of degradation. Some have lost successful professions or businesses, they've lost their family and their home. Finally, with great struggle they rise from the gutter and begin life anew. But when asked what he wanted more than anything else in the world, he said, more than anything else I want another drink. Every day is a struggle not to indulge in what he knows will kill him.

Often we crave for things that do us great harm. Maybe it's our diet, maybe it's something financially irresponsible, maybe it's something very hurtful to another. What is it that you are looking for? Is what you crave for life-giving?

If I go and get a pizza or maybe some chips and dip or a bowl of ice cream, it gives a short-lived level of satisfaction. In the long run, it doesn't make me feel better. Rather, I end up wishing I didn't eat that. What am I looking for? I hunger for much more than something to eat. I hunger for meaning and purpose, I want to be, I need to be worthwhile, I hunger for truth and sincerity, I hunger for love, I hunger for God.

Today's Gospel tells us, "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life." My absolute favorite saint is John of the Cross. His writings are an antidote for me when I find myself embroiled in the consumer mentality. A

good subtitle for the writings of John of the Cross would be ‘1001 reason to divest myself of material goods.’ Here is a small example: “We obtain more joy and recreation in material goods through the dispossession of them, for if we do attach ourselves to temporal goods, it is like a bond that nails our spirit to the earth, and does not allow freedom of heart.” (Ascent to Mount Carmel. Bk III, ch 20, #2)

In today’s Gospel Jesus says, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” (John 6:24) Listening to this teaching of Jesus is scary for me. I am reading the diary of Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonah*. In the entries that surround the days of his ordination to priesthood he says that he cannot imagine how anyone could be a priest without the vow of poverty. How can I represent Christ in this world without giving up all that I have? That is my dilemma.

There is the story of a retired man and wife who would make dozens of sandwiches, drive to a poor section of town, and give the sandwiches to the homeless. Some of the homeless quickly ate the sandwiches and said thank you. Others asked for another to take to a friend. Others complained about the kind of sandwiches, and some tossed their sandwich into the trash can.

Each day God gives us not a mere sandwich to eat. What do we do with it? Take and nurture that which is most precious in your life.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:20)