

Jesus said, “**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.**”

Our Gospel reading today is the middle of a conversation that turned into something like an argument. The conversation is between Jesus and some Jews who were seeking him. The reason why they were seeking him was because they had been fed with the five loaves and two fish. That impressed them. They were ready to get on board with Jesus. Why shouldn't he be king? Then we'd have loaves and fishes aplenty.

But when Jesus had been found, he put a damper on their plans. He said, “**You shouldn't work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.**” Jesus would not only feed their bellies, but their souls too. There is a food that does not perish in the eating of it, but endures to eternal life. Jesus is that food. He says, “**I am the bread of life.**”

As you heard in the reading, this redirection of their intentions didn't go over very well. They grumbled. They couldn't understand him. They had liked the bread that they had eaten before. Why couldn't he just make some more. That would make them happy. But Jesus as bread? What does that even mean and what are they supposed to do? Eat him? That's ridiculous. They want bread made from barley, not bread made of flesh.

But Jesus's goal wasn't to do whatever needed to be done in order to be popular. When you understand that Jesus wasn't trying to entertain the crowd, or seek their approval, but instead to speak the truth about his Father and about himself, then his words become more understandable. They become more understandable, but only to those who will believe. If you will not believe, then Jesus's words will be strange at best but what is much more likely is that you will be repulsed by them. If you will believe, then what he says is simple and wonderful.

Let's take his main statement, which begins our reading. He says, “**I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**” Jesus is the bread of life. Faith eats him. If you eat this bread, then you will not hunger and you will not thirst. This could be referring to physical hunger and thirst if need be. I wouldn't put it past Jesus who fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. But physical hunger and thirst are not the only kind of lack we might have. Spiritual hunger and thirst are much more important. Spiritually we hunger and thirst after righteousness. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is another way of saying that we haven't got any. We aren't righteous.

We are well aware how damaging it can be to lack food and drink. We can't live very long without them. What about righteousness? Can we live without righteousness? In a sense we can, but it isn't much of an existence.

If we are living without righteousness then we are always needing to live in delusions and under the cover of darkness. We have to hide, so we aren't found out. We don't want to be exposed otherwise people will know what we are really like. It is very important to delude yourself about God, or about what happens when we die. If you are not righteous, then you cannot enjoy the thought of meeting God or being judged by him unless you make yourself forget all the stuff that you have done. Without

righteousness we do well to stay away as long as we can, until we can stave off death no longer. Then our fear begins in earnest.

If a person was righteous, then he or she would not need to worry. It would be nice to have no fear. But many people do not believe that becoming righteous is possible. That's understandable. Consult your own experience. Who hasn't done shameful, embarrassing stuff? Don't we all need to hide from the light lest our evil deeds be exposed? That sounds right to me. We've all blown it one way or another. But this is where Jesus's words in our reading today are so important. They address this need that can seem so impossible to do anything about. Be that as it may, Jesus still says what he says.

He's the bread of life. All you who hunger and thirst for righteousness—because you haven't got any—may eat him and be filled. Then you are righteous. Then you can stand in the judgement. You need not fear the light. Why? Because Jesus was punished in your place for your sins, and he gives you his own righteousness as the Son of God in the place of your sinfulness.

I admit that the picture is strange. Jesus tells us to eat him because he is the bread of life. The Jews grumbled among themselves. What does he mean when he says that he is bread? How are we supposed to eat him? Our brains work the same way as their brains worked, so I think we can understand their confusion. But Jesus does not back down. He doesn't apologize. He presses forward with his points and, if anything, gets only more extreme.

Extreme actions are needed to cure our lack of righteousness. It is not just saying you're sorry. It's not trying harder. Those are some not so extreme actions that come to mind. We must eat Jesus, the living bread sent from heaven. Desperate times call for desperate measures. We desperately need righteousness. Every other attempt will leave us hungry. Then the best we've got to combat our lack of righteousness is deluding ourselves or trying to stay in the darkness.

This is all completely unnecessary. Jesus lays out his Father's will in such a simple way in our reading today. He says, **"This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."**

So simple: **Look to the Son. Believe in him. You'll have eternal life.** Any sinner can grasp hold of that because he says nothing about making it up to God. He says nothing about paying for your own sins. If you know anything about yourself you know that you haven't got that in you. Instead, it's **"Look to the Son. Believe in him."** That's the Father's will. You had no righteousness, but now, believing in Jesus, Jesus has fed you with himself as the bread of life. It's as simple as that.

This reminds me of my favorite statement about evangelism. Evangelism is telling people the Gospel, which is the good news about Jesus. Someone has said that evangelism is like one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread. Beggars, as you know, don't have any money. They can't buy anything. No food. So when beggars get food they like it. They might even tell their friends where they found it.

So, also, with us Christians. We are beggars when it comes to righteousness. We haven't got any. But then Jesus comes along and says, "I'll be your righteousness. **I am the living bread that has come down from heaven.** Eat and be satisfied. Eat and live." The beggar goes from hungry to full. Shouldn't we beggars tell our fellow beggars where we got bread? They too may be forgiven. They too may be completely righteous through faith. Point them in the direction of Jesus who wishes to make himself known throughout the world by means of us beggars. We have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

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