

A 18th Sunday, August 3, 2014

First Reading: Isaiah 55:1-3 (*All you who are thirsty, come to the water*)

Responsorial Psalm 145 "The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs."

Second Reading: Romans 8:35, 37-39 (*Nothing can separate us from the love of God*)

Gospel: Matthew 14:13-21 (*Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist & withdrew to a deserted place*)

♪♪ O God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, your love is finer than life. ♪♪

That chant is a refrain to Psalm 63, one of the prayers that Jesus himself prayed as part of his Jewish tradition. They describe the thirst Jesus had for God, his Abba. In today's Gospel, he went off alone in the boat to a deserted place by himself to talk to his Father about the death of his friend and his cousin, John. He went off alone to grieve.

The psalm describes his hunger and thirst for a world where those in power no longer have to kill the ones who make them uncomfortable. (Herod killed John because John told him that it was not right for him to marry his brother's wife while she was still married to him. This made her uncomfortable and led to her telling her daughter, Salome, to ask for John's head).

The psalm also describes the hunger of the crowd who followed Jesus around the lake, completely forgetting that they would miss supper.

The readings today ask us - Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Or do you have everything you need and want? As someone once wrote, "*We all know the value of a glass of water, but do we know the value of thirst?*"

I believe that there is a hunger and thirst for God so deep in us that it is stronger than any other hunger. Richard Rohr calls it "a God sized hole." That hunger reflects the hunger of Jesus to be at one with his Abba.

The readings today are meant to feed us, but even more they give us hunger and thirst for God. They challenge a world that fills us with all kinds of food and drink, and tells us that the goal of life is to come to a place where we never feel thirst or hunger. We can get so full of things and wants - so full of ourselves and our concerns that there is no room for God.

We can be constantly connected by i-phones, i-pads, blackberries and tweets but so disconnected from flesh and blood people and the living God that we scarcely know we are hungry for a deeper connection - that we are hungry for love and for the God whose name is Love. We need to hunger and thirst as Jesus did at the lake and from the cross. And what was Jesus thirsty for? What were his hungers? He was hungry for justice, for communion with God, for everyone to be able to eat.

We live in a culture that tells us that hunger is bad, and yet does so little to provide for the truly hungry. We live in a time that tells us that fasting is foolish. We go to movies that make a game out of hunger. Yet the truth is that we are not hungry enough for the truly real or are thirsty for things that will not nourish our deepest needs. We need to find and value our hunger and thirst for the real, for divine life, for God.

And the first stage of that awareness is to grieve the fact that children are hungry all over the world, and even in our own country. We are called to grieve the uncomfortable truth that some veterans are homeless and without health care. We need to lament the fact that children are being threatened with immediate deportation to situations that threaten their lives or could make them victims of human trafficking.

Only the light of faith can empower us to take a clear view of reality and to make choices that may not fix the whole problem, but which help us face it with active hope. It is only our faith in the one who feeds and heals and reconciles that can give us the hope and grace to face these truths and discern what we can do to feed the hungry and give hope to children & adults.

When we can feel our own real hunger for God, we can resonate with the hunger and thirst that Jesus feels - his passion to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to reconcile enemies, to end war, to release prisoners, to bring light to those in darkness.

We need to let Jesus feed us.

And, like the apostles in the Gospel, we need to feed each other.