

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Now that August is upon us and we find ourselves well into summer, I would hazard to guess that few here have not eaten a hot dog or two. But I am equally sure that few here want to know what is in a hot dog. We eat them. We enjoy them. But we really don't want to know what's in them.

That was surely the case with the Israelites of the Exodus. When they woke up that first morning after complaining and grumbling to Moses and God, they saw the ground covered with tiny flakes or pellets and they asked "Manna", "what is this"? Moses told them, "This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat." Thus, this substance which is the secretion of an insect that punctured the fruit of a particular tree that when excreted by the insect congeals on the ground and can be eaten raw or made into a loaf and baked, as one would bread came to be known as "Manna".

Now that you know that, I know that no one here really wants to know what goes into the making of a hot dog.

But, with regard to the "miraculous" feeding of the Israelites of the Exodus event, we can see that God uses every-day things—a rarely flying, "ground" bird called a quail and the droppings of insects—to sustain his people, but with the caution, not to hoard it for the manna would spoil if kept overnight and cause sickness and even death. God expects his people to trust him to provide for them day-by-day. During all their years journeying in the desert, God's people thanked Him for providing for them, and because of their gratitude, He fed them all the way to the promised land.

There's a great lesson in that for us. When God has blessed us with all that we need to sustain ourselves and our families, he expects us to share our excess, not to save "for a rainy day" or "our future". Rather God's expectation is that we, like the Israelites of Exodus, will trust Him to provide for us and thank Him so that He might bless our gratitude and lead us along the path of our lives to ever-lasting happiness with Him.

Jesus builds on this lesson in speaking to the crowds that followed him after the feeding of the thousands. Again, you remember last week how the Lord took what was offered by the young boy, a couple of loaves of bread and a few fish. It wasn't much. But it was all the boy had. And it was his generosity that allowed Jesus to bless it and multiply it so that the thousands could be fed.

The Lord says to them that he realizes that they're no longer following him because their hungry. They've had their fill. So, he tests them, much as God tested the Israelites of Exodus and, more or less, asks them what they really want.

Recognizing that He is in communion with God, they ask Him, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?”

Isn't that a great question to ask the Lord after He has fed your hunger, met your needs, sustained your life, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?”

The Lord tells them, and he tells us, all you have to do is trust the God who sustains you and believe that “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

To understand what this may mean in our own lives, it might be well for us to explore our basic human hungers. We all hunger for life. We all hunger for love. And we all hunger for meaning.

In our hunger for life we seek the means to sustain our lives—food, shelter, warmth, or on a day like today, a little cooling. A solitary life, without others with whom to share its hopes, its dreams, its joys, its pain and suffering, becomes unbearable. We all hunger for love.

To be born into this world, grow up, get educated, get a job, raise a family, acquire stuff, get sick, get old, and die, with no known purpose or point to it all leaves a person with a deep emptiness. We all hunger for meaning for our lives.

The Modernist philosophers of the past century, Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre posited this emptiness as the reality of life. They concluded there's no reason to life, no meaning. Their position was that life is ultimately foolish absurdity. Their conclusion was that the only thing that sustained us in life was the cowardice to die, to kill ourselves.

This view of life then grips humanity in three fears--the fear of death, the fear of guilt or shame, the fear of meaninglessness. These fears then lead to the mad search for escape. For some it's a matter of giving in to death itself by suicide. Others, who never experience joy, settle only for fun. Unable to find peace within, others take pills to go to sleep and other pills to wake up and other pills for headaches and the like. Still others become absolutely hopeless and slip into alcoholism or drug addiction.

If life is the foolish absurdity of Camus and Sartre, no matter which way we turn will turn out to be the wrong way.

It was to fill this emptiness, this meaninglessness, that Christ came into the world. “I am the bread of life,” said Jesus, “whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” You can search all over the earth to find that one thing that is missing in your life, but until you feed on Jesus, you will never be satisfied.

Recently I was standing in line at Walmart. There was a woman and her young son in front of me. The boy saw a piece of candy that he wanted, but his Mom told him no, that he couldn't have it. Well, of course, the little fellow had to make his disappointment rather loudly known. He cried, he stomped his feet, and then, he wailed some more. Finally, the exasperated Mother blurts out, "What can I tell you, Billie? Life sucks, and then you die."

I almost started to cry. I wondered is that what we are telling our children, not in so many words, but the way we live our lives? Is that why our society is so messed up? Because it's true, isn't it? Without doing the works of God by believing in Christ and feeding on He, who is the Bread of Life, life does suck...and then we die. Is that why we have so many today committing suicide or drugging themselves or drinking themselves into stupors?

Even then, it's not enough to believe in Jesus, the Bread of Life for a loaf that is not broken and shared becomes stale and moldy. No, it's not enough for us just to feed on Jesus, the Bread of Life. Like the little boy who generously shared his loaves, that the Lord might bless them and multiply them to feed the multitude, we too must generously offer the Bread he has given us that He may bless it and multiply it, and feed our sin-sick world that hungers for it. This is the work that God wants to do in us.