

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:1-3

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

Thus says the LORD: All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18

The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. The Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.

The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The eyes of all look hopefully to you, and you give them their food in due season; you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The Lord is just in all his ways and holy in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:35, 37-39

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans:

Brothers and sisters: What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Matthew 14:13-21

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. The crowds heard of this and followed him on foot from their towns. When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured

their sick. When it was evening, the disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place and it is already late; dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have here." Then he said, "Bring them here to me, " and he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over, twelve wicker baskets full. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection for Sunday the 18th Week of the Year

In the first reading from Isaiah, God makes some powerful promises. Come to the water. Come eat grain and drink wine and milk. Listen and heed. Delight in rich fare. I will renew you with the everlasting covenant. Bring nothing aside from yourself. If you have nothing I will satisfy you. When we die, we take nothing from this life with us. Is this what life after death will be? I always maintain that when God makes these sweepingly grand statements they are not just spiritual and for the life to come. God promises them now, when we still live and when we need them. To experience God's gifts now and to recognize satisfaction as we live life show us that God's promises are real and we can trust God.

How does this promise fit our world, our community, our family and our individual lives? Will God make real his promise when there is a cure? Will the promise unfold when our lives return to normal? Can we know and experience God's promise unfold now in the midst of pandemic and prejudice?

Moses encountered God in a burning bush. In God's conversation with Moses God spoke God's name, YHWH. There are no vowels in written Hebrew and the actual pronunciation of God's name is uncertain, but we spell the name YAHWEH. God's name is so holy that God's name is never uttered aloud. In Jewish articles I've read the word God is often spelled, "G*d." In our translation of the bible the word YHWH is rendered the LORD. God told Moses the meaning of God's name, "I AM who AM." There is a poem or prayer I know that emphasizes the name's meaning in life:

I was regretting the past and fearing the future; suddenly my Lord was speaking:
My name is I AM"

He paused. I waited. He continued.

When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there.
My name is not I WAS.

When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there.
My name is not I WILL BE.

When you live in this moment it is not hard; I am here.
My name is I AM.

Helen Mallicoat

I include this poem because we can know God's promise now. We face troubles and take risks every single day of our lives; here we are. We know that our families love us and need us even though we may be separated from them. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of realities we do not see." When, in Isaiah, God says come to me, listen and heed, we come to God in faith. What seems so distant is already part of us. Whenever we think of God we pray. What ever we offer God is prayer. Even our sorrow, fear and anger directed to or at God is prayer. God may be the only one in our lives that will accept our anger and not be hurt. When we get angry with the people closest to us we can push them away. God draws us more closely to God in our anger (segue into Romans.) Paul asks today, "What will separate us from the love of Christ?" He gives a long answer in the rest of the passage. The short answer is, "nothing."

We may be separated physically from those we love. We may hear them by phone; visit them by Skype or Zoom. We may communicate via text or email and not in person. We are still in contact. We long for one another. Our love is real. Nothing has really separated us from them. We are not distant from their hearts. Our relationships remain real.

"Wonder and Awe," is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It used to be "Fear of the Lord." Some may feel that to express anger to or at God will prompt God to do something worse in retaliation. We've learned this, unfortunately, since we were children. Crime and punishment, the name of a Dostoyevsky novel, is what we see all around us. We punish criminals or those who hurt us. That's the human approach. God works in a different way. God sent Jesus, his son, to live among us as one like us. Though being God, Jesus took on the cross and died to redeem us. In God's mind sin led the human race to redemption through Jesus' blood. Through our individual sins, God leads us to forgiveness. God is love. God's love is eternal and unconditional. Mercy and compassion are fruits of God's love.

I fear what COVID 19 may do to me since I am in the "at risk," part of the population; I like life and don't really want to die. However, I experience wonder and awe how this virus has perfectly adapted itself to maximize infection. People are infectious before they develop symptoms. People pass it on oblivious to the fact that they are ill. I experience wonder and awe as well at those who do not wear a mask in public and congregate closely. They seem oblivious, given how the virus spreads for wearing a mask does not completely protect the wearer from contracting the disease but keeps them from transmitting the disease to others. The virus is trapped within the mask as they breathe. I pray that the Holy Spirit will lead the medical researchers to a cure for COVID 19 with a treatment and vaccine. I also pray that the Holy Spirit will lead people to keep each other safe by wearing a mask in public too.

The Gospel, today, began with a great loss. Jesus kinsman, John the Baptist, died. This was personal to Jesus. Normally we don't think in terms of Jesus ever experiencing grief. As a fellow human being, he did. Why would Jesus withdraw to a deserted place? There is a Jewish tradition that the body must be buried by sundown the day of death, if possible. Following the burial, the family, friends and neighbors would sit Shiva to mourn for the following week. I can imagine this to be first in Jesus' mind to do. However since the great crowd of people followed

Jesus and turned the deserted place into a pilgrimage, he didn't mourn very much. As he arrived Jesus continued his ministry to them instead.

I grew up on the North side of Chicago. We had corner stores, public water fountains, restaurants, taverns and fast food joints. I'm old enough, though, to remember the days before McDonalds, Burger King and Subway. I took it for granted that food, water and drinks were very much available. Rarely did we go anywhere when that was not true. In 1993 I met a priest who became one of my close friends. He served in Santa Fe, NM. He invited me to visit. That I did for nearly twenty years until he died. I learned that although the towns and cities of New Mexico were just like home, most of the state is basically a deserted place. When we went touring into the desert, we needed supplies, at least water. I always wore a hat with a broad brim to keep my neck and nose from sunburn, wore long sleeves for the same purpose and brought a jacket incase we had car trouble and had to endure a chilly night.

I digress. The people who followed Jesus lived in a place that was mostly desert. The text says that Jesus disembarked. That means, literally, Jesus got out of the boat. This was near the Lake of Galilee. The crowd must have walked there. No one would walk any distance without food or water. Jesus and the disciples brought enough food for themselves, five loaves of bread and two fish. This was a place of a great miracle. Jesus fed this vast crowd. He shared what he had for his disciples and himself with that crowd.

What is the greater miracle, to create something out of five loaves and two fish or to change the human heart? Since our hearts can be broken and we find it difficult to do what's right, perhaps it's the latter. I would like to think that Jesus' selfless gesture of providing the supplies he had with the crowd prompted them to share what they had with each other as well. I say this because I know that no one in their right minds would take a day trip in the desert without food and water. God turning people's hearts to their neighbors is an ancient biblical theme. It is also an apostolate of Divine Savior Parish to help feed the people of St. Eulalia, a mission for today. With so many people unemployed because of the pandemic, this interpretation of the feeding of the multitude can have great relevance for us.

What remained, after crowd had its fill, was abundance. There was more than enough food for them. They had all caught a glimpse of Jesus' promise. They knew Emmanuel; God was among them. The Kingdom of God was near. Jesus generosity broke down the barriers between them; they all shared a meal together. Jesus does this work among us now. We share a meal together with Jesus. We glimpse, too, the promised kingdom as we serve one another.

I pray you are well and safe. We share the responsibility to keep one another safe as we keep ourselves safe.

James D. Beath
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