

Lectio Divina: Psalm 145: 14-16; Mark 9:41

Feed the Hungry and Give Drink to the Thirsty

These two are corporal works of mercy. When we give food and drink to those in need, we are giving them something they need to live. No one should be deprived of these things, and it is a tragedy that many go without. In medical circumstances, it is morally obligatory to provide food and water to a person unless he or she is no longer able to receive the nutrition. Every person is in need of physical substance. From the most wealthy, to the poorest, the famous, and the forgotten, the wicked and the saint all need to eat to survive. For our lives to be so dependent on a simple thing is a reminder of how fundamentally poor and dependent we are on God and how wrong it would be to deprive anyone else of nourishment. It is a humbling reflection. It is easy to become so convinced of our own necessity, our indispensability, our importance, influence, power, that we forget about how fragile life is.

It is good that as a parish, we have an outreach center which offers food to those who may need it. Many people buy food for the outreach center and drop it off at the church. There are also many who volunteer to serve at the outreach center itself. Recently there have been many concerned with donating water to Flint because of the water contamination. You may hear of schools and groups from different states sending semi-truck loads full of bottled water to Flint.

But what more can we do to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty? These works of mercy really call us to provide food and water to the needy, but people experience a kind of hunger and thirst that is deeper than physical hunger and thirst. Their hearts are thirsting for something else. When we give someone food or water, we are trying to satisfy their physical hunger, but we should also be aiming to satisfy their spiritual hunger. Every person thirsts for love and hungers for communion. Everyone whether they know it or not, has a deep desire to be loved and cherished by God and their fellow man. For this reason, it is important to have personal interaction with those whose hunger and thirst we are trying to alleviate rather than to simply “write a check and be done with it” so-to-speak. While it is very good to donate food and water and money, it is better to give personally. It is better to be present to the person so that we not only give material goods but love also. Through personal interaction, the heart is affected. The giver is more generous and compassionate, the receiver is more grateful. When you see the face of one afflicted by hunger or thirst, you see the face of Christ; and when the receiver encounters the giver, hopefully he may see the face of his tender and merciful Lord. (Matthew 25: 31-45).

Personal contact is also fundamental to evangelization. Intellectual people may be converted through their own pursuit of knowledge. But everyone needs an encounter with the Lord that speaks to the heart. We can encounter the Lord’s presence through the kindness and charity of others.

I think it is appropriate to feature a popular example of one who fed the hungry and gave drink to the thirsty, not only physically but spiritually; that is Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She is known for her work amongst the poorest of the poor. She brought in the dying from the streets; she cleaned their wounds, washed them, fed them, and clothed them. In doing so, she treated the poor with the dignity that they deserved as human beings created in God’s image. She was working against a culture of indifference,

where many might simply ignore a dying person. But Mother Teresa did not simply give people food, or medical treatment, or education, she offered them love from God. She brought them out of isolation and brought them into communion, treating them as one of God's children, even if they were not Christian.

But there was one person whose thirst Mother Teresa desired to quench more than all the others—that person was Jesus. She meditated upon his words on the cross, “I thirst” and she knew that these words meant that he was thirsting for her and for all souls. Her work and mission to others was an effort to quench the thirst of Christ by bringing souls to him. Christ thirsts for our love and the love of all. We love him in loving others.

In the 4th chapter of John's gospel, Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well. He asks her for a drink, even though it would be unclean to drink from a Samaritan woman's water jar. But as their conversation progresses, the woman gradually becomes aware that Jesus is the Messiah. Being converted from her former sinful life, the woman leaves her water jug at the well and spreads word of Jesus throughout her village. The disciples return to Jesus, and after telling him to eat something, Jesus replies, “I have food to eat of which you do not know” and “Doing the will of him who sent me and bringing his work to completion is my food...” (Jn4:33-34). These words of Christ demonstrate that the Samaritan woman with whom he had been speaking satisfied the hunger and thirst of Jesus. He came to save the lost, to bring them back into communion with his Father, to worship him in “Spirit and truth.” (Jn4:24).

This mystery of Christ's saving work is what is behind even these most simple works of mercy, to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. Let us try to keep this in mind as we perform them. Let us not hesitate to have personal contact with the hungry and the thirsty, whose suffering we aim to alleviate, and through whom we encounter Christ; and let us remember the example of Mother Teresa who was motivated to serve others out of compassion for the thirst of Christ.

Questions:

Can you share any experience you have of feeding the hungry or giving drink to the thirsty?

Have you ever experienced a time where you felt very much in need? Perhaps you were worried how you were going to “get by”? Did the charity of another help you through that time?

What do you think about the relationship between food and evangelization?

Homework:

In your prayer, meditate on the thirst of Christ. Maybe use the Gospel of the Samaritan woman, the Crucifixion, or reflect on the Sacred Heart of Jesus.