

“Give Us Our Daily Bread”

II Corinthians 9:8-15

Bread means bread – but it also means much more than bread. It is a metaphor for the material necessities of life. When we pray for daily bread, we recognize our dependence upon God for “bread”, our dependence upon God for all those things that sustain life, that bring security, that make the experience of being alive a good experience.

On this Mother’s Day, we give thanks for moms who sustain life, bring security, and that usually make the experience of being alive a good experience. But for all too many people, especially children, the experience of being alive is not a good experience because moms are absent and bread is scarce. And that matters to God.

Christianity cannot be reduced to a concern with spiritual things alone. It also has to do with the earthy, the fleshly, the bodily, the physical. When Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10), he wasn’t only talking about eternal life. He was also talking about this bodily life we live right here and now.

This life we live right here and now is a gift of God through our mothers who gave us birth. But it is a fragile, vulnerable gift – we so easily suffer and die from want of bread – and so we pray for daily bread. In the Hebrew book of Sirach (written about 180 B.C.) we are told, “The necessities of life are water, bread, and clothing, and also a house.” In our globalizing

world, we might add to the list: health care, education, equal opportunity, freedom from political and military violence or whatever it is that gives security, happiness, and meaning to human life.

When we pray for daily bread, we pray for it all – for ourselves and for everyone else. No exceptions. 500 years ago, Martin Luther in writing about the Lord’s Prayer in our catechism, prayed for it all when he wrote: “Daily bread means everything included in the necessities and nourishment of our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, and upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors and the like.”

Luther prayed for it all, for everyone. No exceptions. And it would be done. It is not a question of scarcity. God created our beautiful blue-green planet in such a way that it naturally provides in abundance all that is needed for all people to live well. God continues to give daily bread in abundance. The problem is one of distribution, and the will to distribute fairly. And that’s our problem, not God’s.

One way we try to positively influence the distribution of daily bread is to write letters to our elected senators and representatives each spring as part of a ministry called “Bread for the World.” Every spring we find Dick Wittig in the narthex with tables, pens, paper, and sample

letters to motivate us to write to Congress.

This year we are writing to urge Congress to protect and strengthen two key tax credits. The Earned Income Tax Credit was established in 1975 to help low income families hold on to more of their earnings. According to a 2006 Brookings Institution study, this tax credit lifts more children above the poverty line than any other government program.

We are also urging Congress to keep the Child Tax Credit in place, which until recently was not available to families with incomes below \$11,300. Until recently, nearly 10 million children living in poverty in the U.S. didn't benefit from the credit. So take a few minutes to write a brief, personal letter to become part of a nation wide offering of letters as a message of hope for hungry people right here in this country.

The problem has always been one of distribution and the will to distribute fairly. It is our problem, not God's. And to overcome that problem, we not only pray for daily bread but we join with Bread for the World in an offering of letters to help make sure our nation's children don't go hungry.

St. Paul was very good at letter-writing and somewhere in the midst of each letter is an appeal to his Christian brothers and sisters to help buy bread for their much poorer counterparts back in Jerusalem.

In our second lesson from II Corinthians 9:8-10, St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that as

God has blessed them, so they ought to be a blessing to the poor. Paul writes . . . ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

The Corinthians were generous in their sharing because they had learned that there was nothing more important than food in making life worth living, except one thing – food eaten together. From the family meal to the village festival, from dinner out with someone special to a lunch break in the cafeteria, from the church potluck to the wedding feast, from sitting around a campfire roasting hot dogs to inviting friends over for pizza – eating together is one of the best things we do.

Relationships are formed around food whether it be sitting around a table in the fellowship hall after a funeral or serving a meal in the Redeemer basement. We get to know each other, we discover our commonalities, we laugh and cry, we gossip and listen, we celebrate our joys and share our sorrows – all around food. In so many ways, sharing food is the tie that binds us together.

Jesus ate with anybody who would eat with him. And he was criticized for it. About

himself he said, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’” No one was excluded from Jesus’ table except those who excluded themselves. The only ones who didn’t experience the good food, good wine, and good times at Jesus’ table were those who thought they were too good to eat and drink and talk to the folks who joyfully sat down to the table with him.

Jesus’ meals with “tax collectors and sinners” were a powerful symbol that in Jesus God’s rule had begun. For centuries, the great “day of the Lord,” the coming of God’s kingdom had been symbolized by a great banquet where everyone had their fill of the finest food. One of the great prophecies of this “great day of the Lord” comes from the prophet Isaiah, and there is no doubt but that Jesus knew it well: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.”

Jesus’ open meals with “tax collectors and sinners” were a foretaste of this feast to come. Our daily bread, our meals together, are also a foretaste of the feast to come.

So whether we are eating bread today or anticipating the feast to come, eating bread is a physical act – but sharing bread is a spiritual act. Jesus hungers and thirsts for the new world of righteousness, the new world of love and forgiveness, the coming world of everyone eating together. Jesus hungers and thirsts for multiplying loaves for the hungry.

We hunger and thirst for so much and so much of what we hunger and thirst for does not satisfy. So much of our time as moms and dads, so much of our work, so much of our efforts and planning go into acquiring either for ourselves or for our families the next thing that we hope will satisfy our hunger. But they don't.

Our true hunger is for God and nothing that we acquire can satisfy that hunger. The road to that which finally satisfies our hunger, the road to that which finally stills our restlessness, which finally makes sense out of our lives – runs through Jesus.

When we pray for daily bread, we are also praying for the “bread of life.” We are praying for a deepening, nourishing, life-giving relationship with Jesus.

Let us pray: Giving God, grant me and all people sufficient bread for the journey through life. Amen.

May the peace of God . . .

#712 - Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service