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Hallowing and Sharing Food

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Hallowing and Sharing Food

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Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for August 3, 2014 for Cycle A:
Is 55:1-3; Ps 145; Rom 8:35, 37-39; Mt 14:13-21

HALLOWING AND SHARING FOOD

Lawrence E. Frizzell

Food and its preparation constitute a major concern for vast numbers of people in every part of the world. For some, the acquisition of something edible each day or two spells the difference between life and death for themselves and their families. Others may spend considerable sums trying to satisfy a jaded palate. Some will surround their meal with customs that manifest spiritual and social values; others will have little regard for family, neighbor or God as they satisfy their need for food and drink. What attitudes are being cultivated in your home?

This Sunday the Church offers a selection of passages from the Bible that provide an occasion for evaluating our attitude toward hunger and nourishment. Like all else in life, food is seen as a gift from God. Whenever Jesus ate he took the bread, the staple of life in his culture, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing, an act of thanks-and-praise to his Father. "Blessed are you, Lord, king of the universe; you give us bread from the earth."

A more elaborate prayer would be offered after the meal, following the law recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy. "When you have eaten your fill, you must bless the Lord, your God, for the good land that he has given you" (8:10). This is an "ascending" blessing in response to the covenant which expresses God's love for his people (see Dt 7:12-15). The greatest divine blessing is life itself, not only physical existence but, above all, communion with the living God.

The text from the Book of Isaiah invites the poor to fulfil their dream of adequate food and drink without worrying about the cost. Then they are encouraged to "listen that you may have life" (55:3); God's Word will initiate them into a fuller experience of communion with their Lord. "I will renew with you the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David" (55:3). The covenant expresses a profound relationship between God and his people, rooted in the past acts of redemptive mercy and pointing toward the eternal union that is the fullness of life.

The multiplication of loaves by Jesus reminded the disciples of God's care for Israel in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. It also pointed to the new and everlasting covenant of the messianic age; it anticipated the Last Supper and Jesus' gift of himself as the Bread of Life.

The Gospel offers two additional lessons. First, Jesus demanded the cooperation of his followers. "There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves." Of course, he knew that the resources at hand are inadequate. The disciples must learn that his presence and intervention make their efforts fruitful. As we face the enormous problems of hunger in our day, we must have simplicity to share what we have, and the faith that Christ in our midst can enrich our good will in surprising ways.