

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Bread of Life,  
Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

Have you ever been really hungry? I mean, really hungry... As many of you know, several years ago I had stomach bypass surgery. Besides being overweight, I had the surgery because I had out of control diabetes, and I was told that the stomach bypass basically cures diabetes, if you're not insulin dependent and you've been a diabetic less than 5 years. So, I had the procedure. After the surgery my doctor told me I could not have any type of food for the first 2 weeks. The only thing I was allowed was water or water with unsweetened flavoring like Crystal Lite. The first couple of days weren't so bad as I was recovering from major abdominal surgery. However, after about 5 days, when I was discharged from the hospital, I began to have real hunger pains. I'll tell you that when you're hungry, water, even if it's flavored with Crystal Lite doesn't satisfy your need for food. I discovered something else that I had never noticed before. Right after commercials for car insurance, commercials for food and restaurants comes a close second. It seemed like every time I turned around there was another TV Ad for Applebee's or KFC Chicken, Big Macs, or something else I wasn't allowed to eat. It just made me all the more hungry.

Back in the time of Jesus most people knew the pain of hunger. It was mostly an agriculture-based economy. The people eked out a bare bone's

existence. They baked small loafs of bread in a communal oven made of mud and straw. They had no way to keep meat from spoiling other than salting it. So, for the most part they only had meat when there was a special occasion or a festival. I wasn't there, but from everything I've learned about the time of Jesus, most of the people knew hunger and experienced hunger more days than they were full. In between those special occasions and festivals, the people only had bread and water or if they were lucky, bread and wine to fill the gnawing pain inside their stomachs.

Into this food insecure people comes Jesus. To fully understand the context of His "I AM, the Bread of Life" saying we should have read the first part of Chapter 6 where Jesus fed perhaps up to 15,000 people from 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. The feeding of the multitude is the only miracle story, other than the resurrection, recorded in all four of the Gospels. This was such an important story because it addressed our most basic need, food for our bodies. Yet, precisely because Jesus addressed the people's most basic need for food, they missed the point of the whole feeding miracle as a sign that points us to Jesus divinity. The people were so enamored with Jesus and his supernatural ability to fill their empty stomachs they wanted to force him to be their king. Jesus had to retreat to the mountain top to avoid instant coronation. After a time of prayer, he walked across the Sea of Galilee, meeting up with the disciples. Now, hindsight is 20-20 and we

know Jesus didn't come to be that kind of king. He had much bigger target in sight. Rather than simply filling our bellies for a short time, Jesus wanted us to know real peace and security. Eventually, the people from the crowd discovered Jesus on the other side of the lake and followed him. That's when Jesus took the time to explain what the feeding miracle, as a sign, points to.

Jesus tells the people not once, but twice in this passage, "I Am, the bread of life.: When we feed on His Word and quite literally on His Body and His Blood in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we receive this Bread of Life. This was a hard concept for the people back then to wrap their brains around and it's just as hard for us today to understand. We all understand that when we eat regular bread that our hunger goes away, temporarily. We will be hungry again tomorrow or if you're like me within a few hours... Trying to understand eating the Bread of Life and never hungering or thirsting again, well, that's almost as hard to swallow as the question Nicodemus posed, "How can I be born again after being full grown and old?" I'm not certain we're meant to fully understand these mysteries. There are some things we simply must take on faith and trust the words of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I can't stand here and tell you that after you take the Body and Blood of Jesus that you'll never hunger or thirst again. I know I'm hungry and thirsty for that life saving and life-giving sacrament as many times as I can receive it. For me, the

way I wrap my head around this is that once I've been instructed by the Father or enlightened by the Holy Spirit, now I at least know where to receive this life-giving Bread. After his death, they found in Martin Luther's pocket a short-handwritten note that read: "We're all just beggars, showing each other where to get the bread..." I trust the words of Jesus who is also the Word of God incarnate when He says "This is my Body and this is my Blood. At the same time, it's so hard to believe that the almighty God who created the universe and everything in it, would become a human being and take my Sin upon himself so that I might have eternal life. Why would the God of the entire universe do that for me?

On this day before Valentine's Day it's good to remember why Our Father in Heaven did all of this. John has already told us the answer back in the third chapter. Jesus was talking to Nicodemus and said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that all who believe in him should not perish." God not only created us, but loves us still, despite all our Sin and faithlessness.

The more I partake of this life giving bread the more I trust in the words of Jesus when He says, "Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." I don't profess to understand how or why this works, but I do proclaim the love and Grace of a merciful God who delights in our humble submission, even when we don't fully understand.

Back to my story of my two weeks of starvation after my stomach surgery... Even when I was allowed to begin to eat solid food, I actually couldn't eat. My system had been shut down for so long, and my stomach was now the size of my thumb. I had to be very careful what I put into my mouth because my eyes are literally bigger than my stomach!. If I put something in that's too big it will get stuck. I still have that issue today, although not as often. I've learned to chew my food thoroughly before swallowing it. My first meal after the surgery was a bowl of chili from Wendy's. I bought one of those hand baby food grinders and put everything through the grinder. It tasted like mush, but it was the best food I have ever eaten. I mean after two weeks of starvation and over 20 pounds lost, I was more than ready for something besides water. For me, the same holds true of the Holy Sacrament of Communion. If I go more than a little while, I'm starving for the true food and the true drink that brings salvation and forgiveness.

Unfortunately, we're not celebrating Holy Communion today, but next week, when we do celebrate this tangible gift from God, ask yourself how long can you go without the refreshment that Jesus plainly says we must have in order to have eternal life... How long does this promise last in your mind, before the devil starts eroding it's benefit in your life? Maybe you can go two weeks or more between God's loving embrace and reassurance. I can only speak for myself here, but for me, I begin to question and doubt after just a few days. Pretty soon I forget that

I'm supposed to be abiding in Christ and Christ in me. I begin to know that I need another infusion of true food and true drink once again. God's love hasn't changed. God's promise hasn't changed. God's power and God's will hasn't changed... What's changed is me. The cares of the world, the devil's accusations, and my own sinfulness begin to crowd out the promise of eternal life and I start to question the promise. Pretty soon the old Adam in me starts to come out again and I'm right back in the cesspool of my sinful nature. Yes, we are God's people, but we all have that old Adam or Old Eve in us. We're still saints and sinners simultaneously. That's why we need constant reminders of how much God loves us. We're the ones who question the faithfulness of God all the while it's our own faithfulness that falters. We need this the Body and Blood of Jesus as a reminder, to reinforce the mustard seed of faith that can sometimes just be blowing in the wind.

May you receive the Body and Blood of Jesus with the naïve trust of a child as often as it is offered. May the life-giving food and drink of the Body and Blood of Jesus sustain you until we break bread together again. May you trust in the Words of the Man-God, Jesus Christ when He says, "if you eat of this bread and drink of this wine you will have eternal life." Amen.