

July 31, 2011 – Fr. Tim Ralston

“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!” Words from our first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. It’s kind of nice in today’s age, to have someone offer us something for free, and mean it. We’re used to almost everything nowadays costing us something. So, in the midst of this nation’s economic turmoil, it’s comforting to hear our Lord say to us, “You who have no money, come . . . come, without paying and without cost.”

Now, normally, when we find something we want, but don’t have enough money to buy it, we have three options. One option is that we can try to steal whatever it is we want. Another option is to simply go without – to resign ourselves to the idea that whatever it is we want just won’t be ours, at least not now. We could start saving money with the hopes of one day having enough to buy it. The third option is to rely on the kindness and generosity of others with the hope that someone will either buy it for us or to simply give it to us.

This also relates to the spiritual life. For, whether we realize it or not, there is something that we all have a desire for, a yearning for, and that something, or rather Someone, is God. We are the thirsty and the hungry that our Lord is speaking to in the first reading. We need God in our lives, we need His grace, His comfort, His mercy and we need the salvation He offers to us. So, then, how can we get it. Even if God and our salvation were for sale, we don’t have enough money to be able to buy it on our own. Stealing it isn’t an option, for we know that we can never steal from God – we may try, but we’ll always be unsuccessful at it. And we can’t try to save up enough to buy it, as obtaining the grace of God will always be beyond our means and our resources.

We could resign ourselves to just not having God in our lives. Many people live their lives this way. We know this isn’t a good option for us either, because that longing, that desire we have within us, will never be satisfied by anyone or anything but God Himself. And so, we ourselves will never be happy, never experience satisfaction, if we don’t have God.

That leaves us one good option. And that is simply to rely on the kindness and generosity of someone else to give it to us. And God is that Someone else. No one can give us grace and salvation but God. So, our hope lies in the goodness and love of God. God will not disappoint us. He doesn’t even wait for us to make the first move. Rather, He reaches out to us, and invites us to come to the water, to receive grain and eat, to drink wine and milk. He looks at us with great love and says, “Come to me, and I will satisfy your hunger. I will quench your thirst.”

And we can see this in a practical way in our Gospel reading where Jesus miraculously feeds the thousands and thousands of people who are gathered around Him. When He saw the crowds, His heart was moved with pity for them. So, when the disciples approached Him and asked Him to dismiss the crowds so that they could find food for themselves, Jesus couldn’t do it. He couldn’t send the crowds away. So, He gave them food Himself. And we read, “They all ate and were satisfied.”

Jesus had satisfied the physical hunger of the crowds. He wants to also satisfy the spiritual hunger within each one of us. And He mainly wishes to do this by giving us His own Body and Blood for our food and drink. Rather than approaching Him to just receive grain and wine, we come to Him to receive the greatest gift He can offer – the gift of Himself.

Now, Jesus has already offered Himself for us, for our salvation. He did this on the cross on Good Friday. He continues to offer that same sacrifice of Himself for us here at this Mass, on this altar. Jesus knows that by uniting us to Himself, He can satisfy our hunger and He can quench our thirst. His love can and will do this, if we accept it.

See, it’s up to us at this point. God has made the great offer of His love and of Himself to us. Our second reading gave us a list of all kinds of things and creatures and tells us, that none of these can “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is because all of these other things are outside ourselves. So, the only thing that can separate us from the love of God is ourselves. We can choose to separate ourselves. This doesn’t mean that God will stop loving us. God is love, and His love is unconditional and eternal. He will always love us regardless of what we do. But we can choose to reject that love – by our own sinfulness and selfishness, by seeking to satisfy our hunger and thirst with things other than God.

The people in today’s Gospel “all ate and were satisfied.” They were satisfied only because they ate. They could’ve rejected the bread that Jesus was offering to them. In doing so, though, they would’ve gone hungry. We too, can reject what Jesus is offering to us, - His love, His grace, His gift of Himself. But in doing so, we will spend our lives going hungry. We will never be satisfied, never be fulfilled.

So, today, let us make the choice to live for our Lord. Let us stop following the false gods that can never satisfy us. Instead, heed the words of 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!” Let us accept the salvation and life the Lord is offering to us, so that we may eat and be satisfied.