

“True Hunger and Expectations”

Homily of August 13, 2006

by Fr. Aidan McAleenan

“God, I have a problem....” No, not me! I’m reading a story here. Well, I do have problems, but who doesn’t?

“God I have a problem....”

“What’s the problem, Eve?”

“I know that you created me and provided this beautiful garden and all these wonderful animals as well as this hilarious comedic snake, but I’m just not happy....”

“And why is that, Eve?”

” God, I’m lonely. I’m bored and I’m sick to death of eating apples.”

“Well, in that case, I have a solution for you. I shall create man for you.” “Man? What is that?”

“A flawed, base creature with many base traits. He’ll lie, cheat and be vain. He will be witless and will revile in childish things. He will be bigger than you and will like fighting and hunting and killing things. He won’t be too smart.” (...Guys, are you getting upset yet?) “He will look silly when he is aroused but since you’ve been complaining, I will create him in such a way that he’ll satisfy all your needs and you, most certainly, will never be bored again.”

“Sounds great,” said Eve, with her eyebrow raised just a little bit. “Well, God, what’s the catch?”

“Well, you can have him on one condition.”

“And what’s that, God?”

“Well, as I said, he’ll be proud and arrogant and self-admiring. So you will have to let him think that he was the first one that was made. And it will be our little secret, woman to woman.”

(Applause!)

Today in the gospel, clearly it’s about the Bread of Life. And we have the gift of the Eucharist for almost two thousand years and sometimes, as we said at the beginning, we come here and we have the Bread of Life and we take it out into the world with us. We celebrate together. But, you know, there is a fundamental principle, and this is where the Window XP or Mac users, looking in terms of computers, but just this base principle that God has given us this wonderful gift of his son. Now, in saying that, it’s almost like a divine comedy because sometimes you just really wonder, as you walk through life, sometimes it can be really difficult. And I believe that all of us are hard-wired, sort of computer-speak or engineering-speak, we’re wired in our genes to love God, to be good people, and to look for God in our lives. Our hunger, basically, at the very core of who we are, is to go in the direction of God, go in the direction of his love. The quintessential person, the quintessential human being for us is Jesus Christ.

So, is God playing a great big joke on us, to say to us, “I want you; the goal of every human life is to find one’s vocation, to be the best possible person each can be, to be compassionate, loving just like Jesus.” And you almost would think sometimes it’s unattainable because there are moments in our lives when we have hungers. We have hungers for things that are other than the Bread of Life. Now, every single one of us can (I’m going to talk about something that some will say, “Well, that ‘s those people because they are addicted to drugs or they are addicted to sex or they are addicted, they are addicted (Fill in the blank.)....” We all have something that takes us away from God. Ultimately, I don’t think God is setting us up for something that we cannot attain. The other day I was at a Thomas More lecture over at Kaiser for volunteer chaplains. Part of the lecture subject was on Jesus, human and divine. Personally, I don’t see the dichotomy there is between God saying “I am God, I am the Bread of Life, I am the Word made Flesh” and the humanity of Christ because I think his divinity comes through in part through attaining that gift that we can attain too, can become Christ-like. Christ is in every single heart. Our goal is to be like him in his humanity, and, through that, we join his divinity.

But some of those addictions, and I am going to pull one out, addictions to the internet. Does everyone know what Google is? Hands up if you know what Google is.... Only half of you? Where do the rest of you live??? Oh, does somebody use other search engines? Is that it? OK. Well, anyway, I went on and I said.... Actually, I went to Ask.com and Google and I said, “How many hits a day in the United States does the internet get for porn sites?” What do you think it would be? Nine hundred eighty million hits!!! A day! Thirty-seven percent of the internet is focused on this one issue. The revenue generated on the internet for this issue/industry is more than the combined ABC, NBC, Time-Warner and all of the big four media companies together. People sitting in the privacy of their own rooms look at this stuff. There isn’t always that warning that said some of you need to be over eighteen. Eighty-seven percent of those websites do not have a warning, as they should, stating “Do not enter this site unless you’re eighteen years or older.” or something to that effect. And some of the sites take you to other sites and then you get into them and you cannot get out of them.

And so, there is this. I would say getting involved in that and going down that is the road to noplacelike. Like any addiction, like any even going there for a moment, it is one of those things that you have to go back to and you have to go back to and it draws you away from being a compassionate and loving person, because that gift of sexuality is meant to be taken and given in a special place to others. And so, every single person that you are going to look on there is somebody’s mom or somebody’s dad or somebody’s brother or somebody’s sister or somebody’s relative or friend. And every single person is made, in our Catholic tradition we believe, in the image and likeness of God. So, if that soul that is there..... It’s such a sad thing and I’ve talked to several people who have gotten themselves involved in it and it’s one of those things you can never really stop unless you just stop, because you get deeper and deeper and deeper. It’s like any addiction.... Even momentary glances at these sites hurt us.

Christ as the Bread of Life is calling us to live out our lives in the regular world. But you can’t help thinking sometimes that that calls these other hungers that we have that take us away. Well,

some of them are just really difficult. The only thing I can think of is at this lecture I discovered the other day, Thomas Merton who was a great contemplative of the twentieth century said that you need to pray. You need to pray in a little bit of time in the mornings. You need to offer the day to God. You need to be conscious. You need to be alive. You need to be awake. And then, at the end of the day, you look at your day (The Jesuits call it “the Examine.”), looking back at your day and say, “Where did I meet God? ... Where was I a friend? Where was I Christ to others?” Now, that may seem flowery, pietistic language but really that’s the reality. I don’t think God is setting us up. I don’t think God is setting us up to something that we cannot achieve. I think it can be achieved. Look at the saints. Look at the people around us in our lives. We come to this table, and the God, the Word that became flesh, and this flesh that is the Bread of Life, to nourish us along our way, and we take that out into the world.

I heard this story a little while back where a group of nuns in Paris, France, had Mass every single day at four o’clock. This is about expectations. At four o’clock they would have the Mass and the priest that was responsible for going and presiding at the Eucharist got ill one day, and he had a visiting priest from Africa. So he said, “Father, would you mind going over to the convent because I am really quite sick and could you take the Mass?” And he said, “Sure, Father.” And off he goes, trotting over. Custom is in France not to wear clerics. So, this young man arrives at the door. The nun is expecting the priest, and so she opens the door and she looks at this face and says, “Oh, come back later on. We are about to have Mass, and we help the poor at this time and this time and this time.” So, the guy said “OK,” and he just split and went home. A few minutes later, in the rectory, there is a phone call, “Father, where is the priest to say Mass?” Can you imagine how those nuns felt when that priest came back to say the Mass for them? They’re not bad people. They had a very definite idea and an expectation of who was a priest for them, and who was coming to say Mass. They almost lost out.

And I think that’s what is happening today in the Scriptures. The Jews, these men who were looking, the hierarchy, the Pharisees and the Scribes, they were looking for a very definite form of the Messiah. The Messiah they wanted was going to come down from heaven in a big thundercloud, was going to get rid of the Romans, was going to be a King of Kings, and was going to make their lives in Israel all wonderful again and make that happen. But instead, they had Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, standing in front of them and they couldn’t see it. You know, sometimes in our lives we have expectations about who it is that’s around us. And sometimes those expectations can just be really off. We can miss seeing God in our brother and our sister or our friend or people we think we know right beside us. And God could be delivering a message to us in the ordinariness of our days. And I think that’s what the Bread of Life calls us to do, to be Christ-like, to take, as St. Augustine says, take at the table and become what you consume. Bring the Body of Christ to the world, and be the Body of Christ to all people. That is the key. That is the Bread of Life and that’s what God is asking us today here at Christ the King. Amen.