

Notes from the Liturgist...

Is Jesus Christ really my BREAD?

A man lost his wife and he could hardly move on after the loss. After many years of being a widower, he was still visiting the grave of his wife every week. He would spend at least an hour talking to her and tending the flowers planted around her grave. One of his friends, upon witnessing such extraordinary devotion over the years, asked him why he was still so deeply affected by the death of his wife. The widower only answered “she was my bread.” This is because for him, it is still his wife that provides him the energy and encouragement to move on. Just as the bread is an essential and basic food, so also the memories of his wife that continue to inspire her and bring meaning to his daily life.

Some people like Asians who prefer rice over bread as a daily food on the table, they might interpret the words of the widower by rather saying “she was my rice.” The expression “she was my bread” could be spontaneously understood what it exactly meant especially by the people in Jesus’ time. It could have been meaningful for a Jew since that expression relates well to their understanding of what a bread really means.

In Israel, bread has always been the most familiar and universal word for food. From the historical point of view, it was considered by the Hebrews necessary to keep a person alive. Because of its fundamental value, its significance is manifested in a variety of expressions both in the Old and New Testaments. For example, the common food of the Jews is called bread, which means a support to life. Hence, this explains that the term bread is applied to general food. Furthermore, to eat bread means to take food or to eat a meal. In the Lord’s Prayer, the Our Father, we are really asking for food and even for all the material necessities since the term bread is also used in a metaphorical sense. For example, manna is called the bread of heaven.

The cultural significance of bread forms the background in today’s gospel reading. The bread is used in our readings today many times and it has different meanings. First is that of material food, the one produced miraculously by Jesus for a crowd of 5000 people. Another is that of bread from heaven or manna. And lastly Jesus calls himself as a bread. He tells the crowd that he is the real heavenly bread. And this bread, he adds, does not only nourishes the body but also nourishes the soul. This is how precious it is. As it nourishes the soul, it gives life, not just any life but an eternal one.

Jesus calls himself as the bread of life, that is, a bread that confers life to those who partake of it through faith in him and love of neighbor. Today it would be a good occasion to ask ourselves a simple, but an essential question, “Is Jesus Christ really my bread?” -or, if we prefer an equivalent and more enculturated phrasing – “is Jesus Christ really my rice?” in other words, is Jesus Christ the support of my life, that gives meaning to everything I think and do, the central and basic reality of my existence? If we can answer a resounding “YES” to that question, then our lives can be great success regardless of what the rest of the world might think. Christ is the daily bread that will satisfy our hunger. He is our bread that will sustain us in hope...he will give us strength and courage to stand courageously before our struggles and problems. By him, we can make things happen even the impossible ones. This is because he himself says that “no one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, no one who believes in me shall thirst again.” Once we

have found Christ, we discover that nothing else which the world offers can compare with what we have found. For we have found the bread of life, the one thing capable of satisfying our deepest hunger and our deepest thirst.

As we partake the Body of Christ in this banquet, may it renew our strength and courage to continue to trust in the Lord...to continue to live by the words that Jesus gave us. May we always seek for the bread that nourishes us both here on earth and in the eternal life.