

**Rev. David Mercer**

**Homily: 8/2/15**

**18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B: *Where the Church Needs To Be***

**Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15; Ephesians 4:17, 20-24; John 6:24-35**

Last Sunday, we heard of 5,000-plus people in hot pursuit of Jesus. Their hunger gets his attention, so Jesus takes the initiative. He takes what little bread there is, gives thanks, and gives it out. The bread Jesus gives them satisfies the hunger of their souls. The bread Jesus gives them fills whatever emptiness they have in life.

Sunday to Sunday, we gather together in this sacred space, because Jesus takes the initiative to offer you and me a meal. He offers us himself. He offers us the *Bread of Life*.

Today's Gospel proclamation understands that we are in that crowd whom Jesus feeds. The people (including you and me) follow him, knowing he offers a bread that satisfies the hunger of our souls. The crowd speaks to Jesus on our behalf, saying: "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus then tells us:

*I am the bread of life;  
whoever comes to me will never hunger,  
and whoever believes in me will never thirst.*

Keep in mind that this passage from John's Gospel – and this entire Chapter Six about the *Bread of Life* – doesn't stand on its own. In a later chapter of John's Gospel, we hear of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This Good Shepherd cares for his flock, and says:

*I came so that they might have life  
and have it more abundantly.<sup>1</sup>*

That's right! Jesus offers you and me an *abundant life* – life to the *fullest*. Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with you. Jesus wants to have an ongoing meal with you and me. Jesus is the *Bread of Life*.

Teenagers, I ask you to be open to having a personal relationship with Jesus. Despite what some people think and what some people say, a personal relationship with Jesus is more than possible. I'm very grateful for my relationship with Jesus, the *Bread of Life*, who satisfies my spiritual hunger. If you're not there yet, I ask you simply to pray for the grace needed to be open to a personal and strong relationship with Jesus. Please know that I always have time for you.

While reflecting on this homily for today, I thought of my friend, Father Dan Derry, who's now retired.

In 1993, Father Dan starts a mission parish in the poor Edenvale neighborhood in south San Jose. Available property is limited, so parish life begins in what had been a five-and-dime store, in a small, rundown shopping strip along Monterey Highway. The store is

next to a sleazy bar and a hair salon. The primary business in that center is a grocery store that struggles to turn a profit. And yet, that's where Father Dan starts the Edenvale Catholic Mission, knocking down walls and tearing up floor space for an altar. Word slowly spreads that a Catholic mission parish is there, and the Sunday community begins to grow.

However, the location confuses people. I'm there one afternoon to help him move things around for the altar when a patron of the bar stumbles in. Realizing where he is, he starts asking bizarre questions of Father Dan about Church that anyone here would consider rude.

That same afternoon, some kids skateboard by, stop, and return to look inside. They're amazed that the five-and-dime is becoming a Catholic church.

Sometimes Father Dan arrives to find a local drunk sleeping outside the back door and the smell of urine in the air. His first task of the day is to power wash the wall outside the backdoor. And more than one person tells him: "Father Dan, this is where the Church needs to be."

In time, the Edenvale Catholic Mission grows and moves into the grocery store when it goes out of business. It becomes Christ the King Catholic Church, and today it's a lively, multiethnic parish serving the neighborhoods of Edenvale, where Jesus continues to offer a meal to people who are spiritually hungry.

Of course, the neighborhoods of our St. Thomas of Canterbury Parish are quite different from the Edenvale neighborhood. And yet, my prayer is that we begin thinking of our parish as mission territory, too. We don't have drunks stumbling inside, and (thank God) I don't begin the day by power washing the outside walls. Still, we all know people – the people on your street and in your neighborhood, people at your work and at your school – we all know someone who is spiritually hungry. We all know someone who, at some level, feels an emptiness, but doesn't know where to turn with it.

And, our God-given mission is to offer Jesus (the *Bread of Life*) to people who are spiritually hungry. Our mission (your mission) is to let them know that Jesus offers them an abundant and full life. He does so right here at St. Thomas, in this sacred space.

What was said to Father Dan along Monterey Highway I hear being said to me along McCoy Avenue: "Father Dave, this is where the church needs to be." Jesus is the *Bread of Life* so that you and I (and our neighbors and friends, too) "might have life and have it more abundantly."

Barely a hundred years after Jesus, the bishop Saint Irenaeus could say that "the glory of God is a person fully alive." That's life to the *fullest* – that's the *abundant life* that Jesus wants to offer everyone in this mission church of St. Thomas of Canterbury. I ask you to think about who you can invite to join you here on a Sunday for our hour of prayer.

Our parish mission statement expresses it in these words:

*We are a family of Catholic Christians where all are welcomed.  
Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we follow Jesus by making disciples,  
serving others, and changing the world.*

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:10.