Rev. David Mercer  
Homily: 8/9/15  
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B: An Answer To Prayer  
1 Kings 19:4-8; Ephesians 4:30-5:2; John 6:41-51

A church youth group spends part of a summer in a poor community somewhere in the hills of Kentucky, working on some projects for folks who need assistance.

They find themselves working on a woman’s house. With garbage, old cars, and furniture strewn about the front yard and porch, it isn’t their idea of fun. Actually, they hate it. So, they make fun of how people live in those hills. They begin to argue and put each other down. In other words, they forget who they are and why they are there.

Then, the woman who owns the house comes out the front door, crying. She gets all the teenagers to sit down in the front yard. Standing in front of them, she’s shaking her finger at them and let’s them all have it: “What’s wrong with all of you? Don’t you know I’ve prayed and prayed for someone who can help me? Don’t you know how much my children need to have bedrooms and a working bathroom? I’ve prayed for so long, and now you’re here. Don’t you know that you’re an answer to my prayers? Why don’t you treat each other as being an answer to prayer? That’s what you are for me and my family.”

At that moment, what they’re doing is no longer just a job – it’s become their mission. Instead of ripping into each other, they begin to build each other up. After all, when you take into your heart that you’re an answer to someone’s prayer, how can you not be changed?

Of course, we treat each other well at St. Thomas of Canterbury. And yet, it’s a good reminder that your God-given mission (and our parish’s God-given mission) is to be an answer to someone’s prayer.

Hold that thought in your heart, and we’ll come back to it.

Today, we hear John’s Gospel speaking to the early Christian conviction that Jesus is the bread from heaven, that Jesus is the Bread of Life that satisfies our deepest spiritual hunger. Sunday to Sunday, that’s the Good News we proclaim in this sacred space.

Lately, I’ve been saying that our parish is mission territory. Everyone here knows someone (Catholic or not Catholic) – perhaps on your street, in your neighborhood, or at work – someone who feels empty, spiritually hungry, hungry for God. They’re not here to extend their hands and opening the lives for the Bread of Life.

Consider the following: one of the major roads in our parish, about a quarter mile from here, is San Tomás Aquino Road, named for the theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas. What he wrote in the 1200s is as true today as it was back then.
Aquinas wrote that there are four substitutes for God: wealth, pleasure, honor, and power. When someone feels that inner emptiness, they easily try to fill it with wealth, pleasure, honor, or power. The world says that’s what you need. “Feed yourself on them, and your life will be just fine.” However, they really don’t fill that inner emptiness. They really don’t nurture and nourish our souls. That’s because spiritual hunger (the emptiness that everyone feels to some degree) cannot be satisfied by a substitute for God.

The Gospel that early Christians proclaimed long ago, that Thomas Aquinas spoke to 900 years ago, and that we proclaim in this sacred space – that Gospel puts before us Jesus, the Bread of Life, who alone can satisfy the deepest hunger of our souls.

Teenagers: here’s what this can mean for you. When you invite someone to join you here on a Sunday (someone with a spiritual hunger), you’re taking a simple first-step in bringing them to Jesus, the Bread of Life. I ask you to take that step. That person just might begin a spiritual journey to becoming a disciple of Jesus. Of course, we express this in our parish mission statement with these words: we follow Jesus by making disciples, serving others, and changing the world.

When you bring a spiritually hungry person to Jesus with that simple first-step, you are an answer to someone’s prayer.

One last story (a true story) told by best-selling author Anne Lamott in her book, Traveling Mercies.

A girl, seven years old, gets lost one day. She runs up and down the streets of the big town where she lives, but cannot find a single landmark she recognizes. She’s very frightened. Finally a policeman stops to help her. He puts her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drive around until she finally sees her church. She points it out to the police officer and tells him firmly, “You can let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here.”

Anne Lamott adds that that’s why she stays close to her church, because no matter how bad she feels (how lost or lonely or frightened), when she sees the faces of the people at her church and hears their voices, she can always find her way home.2

When you help a spiritually hungry person to be fed by the Bread of Life, not only will they find their way home, but you will be an answer to someone’s prayer.

---


© 2015 by David Mercer