

Rev. David Mercer

Homily: 8/16/15

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B: *Changing the World*

Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

Some years ago, I read of a realtor who encourages house sellers to bake bread the morning of an open house. He feels that the aroma of fresh-baked bread greeting prospective buyers can make the house more homey, more appealing, more easy for folks to see the house as their home.

Now, I don't know how widespread this practice is, nor do I know of research on the effect of the aroma of fresh-baked bread on selling a house, but I find few aromas as appealing and welcoming as that of fresh bread. I'm inclined to think it might work well. For one thing, if I walk past a store and smell fresh-baked bread, I might just follow my nose inside. Few aromas send me as does fresh-baked bread.

There should be little wonder that bread figures so prominently in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Biblical Jesus is always having meals with people. It's said that meals happen so often that it's as if you can eat your way through the Gospels. Also, people know of Jesus as having meals with notorious sinners, and good, religious people of his day are truly bothered by whom he breaks bread with.

Today is the fourth of five Sundays for us to listen to chapter six of John's Gospel. Again, I encourage you to read the chapter straight through on your own. In chapter six, Jesus speaks about a bread that satisfies our deepest spiritual hunger. The chapter begins with Jesus looking out at 5,000-plus people who are spiritually hungry. He takes two fish and five loaves of bread, gives thanks, and shares it with the entire crowd, satisfying their deep spiritual hunger.

Chapter six is a discourse, a pronouncement, a proclamation of our Catholic Christian understanding of what takes place with bread at this altar. We proclaim a Gospel that speaks of Jesus as the *Bread of Life* that sustains our faith and lifts us when we are down.

I've spoken before of a Catholic church in the Holy Land, along the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. The church commemorates the Gospel story of Jesus feeding the people by multiplying the two fish and five loaves of bread.

The church is named the *Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves*. It had been in ruins for centuries, but was rebuilt a few decades ago, complete with mosaics. One mosaic is in the floor immediately in front of the altar. It shows two fish and a basket with only four loaves. A visitor who knows the Gospel story might object, saying that Jesus begins with five loaves and not only four.

However, there's a good reason for omitting one loaf. The fifth loaf is to be supplied by the assembly of believers and, during Mass, will be found on the altar. In other words,

with bread at this altar, Jesus shares with us his mission – a mission to bring the Bread of Life to those who are spiritually hungry.

Teenagers, here's how this can apply to you. Some folks say that God is absent from our lives, and recent studies show that more than fifty percent of Catholics don't think a personal relationship with God is possible. However, the God that Jesus makes known is *not* the Greek god Zeus living on a faraway mountain, disinterested in our lives. To the contrary, Jesus in John's Gospel declares:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him
might not perish but might have eternal life.*¹

God cares. Through Jesus, God is present in your life and my life.

I recall what took place when I was at another parish. (And the woman in this story said it's okay to share it in a homily.)

She possesses a personal, intentional faith and often comes early to Mass just to spend extra time in prayer. Then, one Sunday, I notice she doesn't receive Communion. After Mass, I approach her and ask about it. She tells me she had a lot on her mind, that she had an argument with a relative that left her feeling depressed. She just didn't feel right and wondered if the argument meant her faith wasn't strong enough to justify receiving Communion.

I thought about it for moment and replied: "Isn't that why we receive Communion? Don't we receive Communion because we need the grace Jesus offers us?"

Today's Gospel proclamation reminds us that when we extend our hands and say *Amen*, we receive the very Real Presence of Jesus. Jesus is the Bread of Life, because he makes possible an eternal relationship, an eternal Communion with God.

Our parish mission statement reminds us that *we follow Jesus by making disciples, serving others, and changing the world*. We live the mission first by making ourselves his disciples – disciples with a sense of purpose and mission – truly *intentional* disciples. Also, I know that there's no better way to change the world than by bringing someone to Jesus, even if it begins with a simple invitation to join you here on a Sunday.

We might not have the aroma of bread in the air, but Jesus is the *Bread of Life*. Jesus feeds our spiritual hunger with words proclaimed at this altar and with the faith we share and profess. And when we extend our hearts and hands and say *Amen!* to his very Real Presence, the world begins to change once again.

¹ John 3:16.