

“Hungry & Thirsty”

If you are like me, rarely are you hungry or thirsty. It seems like I’m always grazing – and when I’ve worked up a thirst – a refreshing drink is not hard to find.

God, in His Word today, speaks to those who are hungry and thirsty – not a physical, growling of the stomach, or parched lips – but a thirst for spiritual relief.

Sinners who know their sin are parched by it – starving for relief from the bondage of their sin. But all too often, sinners run around with “full bellies” (if you will) – without hardly a thought about their sin and its devastating effects.

All too often we live in denial – we fool ourselves by thinking that we have not sinned – or, that our sin is no big deal. If we’re not thirsty, we don’t need a drink. If we’re not hungry, we don’t need food. And if we’re not sinners, then we don’t need a Savior from sin we don’t need Jesus.

This is one of the most subtle, and deadly, works of the devil. He is the deceiver – he tricks us into believing that we are not sinners – or that our sin is not a problem, that we’re just fine – so we don’t need Jesus.

Of course, the truth breaks through his deception from time to time. Our sin is just too hard to overlook, and the guilt is more than we can bear. So, the devil has another trick up his sleeve. When the mirror of God’s Law leaves us naked before God – when we can no longer run and hide – the devil uses that truth against us.

Like Judas who realized he had betrayed the Lord – the devil leads us into despair. He continues to deceive. It’s true, he says, you deserve nothing but God’s anger and punishment – and then he lies – “there’s nothing that can be done with your sin” – “you’re hopeless, a lost cause, with only hell in your future.”

This is the background for the Feeding of the 5,000. St. Matthew tells us that Jesus has just heard about the beheading of John the Baptist – and that is why He withdrew to this desolate place by Himself.

Not only was John a relative of Jesus – he is the last of the Old Testament prophets – one who boldly preached God’s Word.

You recall how John had condemned the sin of the King – telling Herod that he was committing adultery with Herodias, his brother’s wife. God says, “you shall not commit adultery,” Herod – you must REPENT of your sin!

But repentance is the last thing a sinner wants to do. He doesn’t want to give up his sin – he wants to live in it – so the devil pushes what the sinful nature wants. “There’s nothing wrong with what you’re doing. You deserve to live the way you want to live – to love whomever you want to love.” And believing the lie, the sinner lives in denial.

God, however, says that “the wages of sin is death” – but that same God says that He does not desire the death of sinners, rather, that they turn from their sin and live. So, John keeps preaching – pointing out Herod’s sin, and calling him to repentance.

Like Judas, Herod tries to take care of his sin by throwing the preacher into prison to shut him up – and Herodias wants John to be silenced, once and for all. So John is put to death.

But God cannot be silenced. His law torments the sinner, accusing him night and day. God’s Law will not be quiet until its work is done – until the broken-hearted-sinner confesses – “I have sinned against God and my fellow man” – “I deserve nothing but God’s temporal and eternal punishment.”

Having heard of John’s death, Jesus withdraws to a desolate place by Himself – but soon, great crowds are flocking to Him once again. These people are like Herod – sinners hungry and thirsty for relief.

So, Jesus has compassion on them – He heals the sick – releasing them from the bondage and destruction that sin has brought into the world, and their lives. But it’s more than just sickness that ravages their bodies – sin has captured their souls as well.

When evening comes – the disciples suggest that Jesus send the people away so that they can go and buy food for themselves. Do you see what is happening? The “followers” of Jesus are sending others away who desire (and NEED) Jesus! “Let them fend for themselves. Let them provide for their own needs.”

But Jesus says, “They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat.” The disciples quickly realize that they can’t feed all these people – “we have ONLY five loaves and two fish” – it’s impossible! And now we’re finally getting somewhere.

“Bring them to me,” Jesus says. Not just the loaves and the fish – but bring these sinners to me. They can’t take care of their own needs. Either they will deny their sin, or live in despair because of their sin. It is impossible for sinners to satisfy the demands of God’s Law – it will only accuse them, crush them, and condemn them. The only satisfaction for sinners is Jesus – who says, “Bring them to me.”

Jesus is not just healing their sicknesses and filling their bellies – He is gathering sinners to Himself to give them relief – to satisfy their hunger and thirst for forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

That same Jesus has gathered you here today – you who have committed adultery – who murdered your neighbor with your thoughts, words, and deeds – who have born false witness against others, trashed their reputations, and treated them as if they were beyond the hope of God’s compassion.

Jesus now says to His Church – “you give them something to eat” – and we stand here, like the disciples, saying – we can’t, we ONLY have a little bit of wine and all these pieces of bread.

“Bring them to me,” Jesus says – and looking up to heaven, He gives thanks, blesses them, and orders them to be given to the people saying – This bread is my Body given into death for you ... this cup of wine is my Blood, shed for you, for the forgiveness of all your sin.

Bring the hungry and the thirsty to me, Jesus says – for I have fulfilled the Law for you – I have paid the price, endured the punishment for all sin – and now, I set you free from the bondage of your sin, so that you may live.

Come, eat and drink, and be satisfied – for the Lord provides all that you need, and more – for your body and soul – for your life in this world, and for eternity. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.