

Tenzing Ghatso, the present Dalai Lama, always has some appropriate words of wisdom to offer. He once said, 'Some people sacrifice their health in order to make money; then they sacrifice their money in order to recuperate their health. Then they are so anxious about the future that they don't enjoy the present; the result being that they do not live in the present or the future; they live as though they are never going to die; and then they die having never really lived.'

Similarly, the Franciscan teacher, Richard Rohr, drawing on the observations of the great psychoanalyst Carl Jung, tells us that most people are living only half of their life. They never get to the second half, and he is not talking about the number of years they live, but how those years are lived.

More people today are beginning to see that life based purely on material or worldly concerns is very limited. It is indeed a half life. Unless there is a 'more than this,' a deeper reference point, particularly, a faith or spiritual dimension, life can be lonely, empty, with certain in death in due course to be either looked forward to or, more likely, to be feared, but certainly assumed to be the end of it all.

The writer of the Book of Wisdom mocks the godless as they say: 'Let us enjoy the good things that exist and make use of the creation..... Let us take our fill of costly wines and perfumes...let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither, let none of us fail to share in our revelry...because this is our portion, this is our lot.' St Paul may have had that text in mind when writing to the Corinthians. He asks them what the point of all his struggles is if there is only human or earthly hope. He might just as well give up and join the call: 'let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.' <sup>1</sup>

It is purely material satisfaction that is challenged in today's Gospel reading. We continue from last Sunday, reading through John 6. Jesus has just fed more than 5,000 hungry people, with a very small amount of food which when placed into his hands proved to be enough to feed them all and with plenty left over. While it was important that those people were fed, that was only part of what Jesus was trying to show them. They were very happy to receive that food, but they go searching for Jesus so that they could get more of the same. When they find him, he tells them that they have not understood what he was

doing for them, He says, 'You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.'

It is their hearts and spirits that also need to be fed and nourished in order for them truly to have life. Jesus explains the nature of this food that endures by contrasting it with manna, the bread that the Israelites of old received in the wilderness.

Whereas the manna was a gift from God, important and necessary as it was, in the 'true bread from heaven' of which Jesus speaks, God himself becomes the gift. Jesus reveals that gift in his own life. He becomes the food of eternal life for us all.

We celebrate and express that truth most especially when we come together as now to share in the Eucharist. As I mentioned last Sunday, St Augustine taught that the purpose of the Eucharist is that 'we become what we eat.' He observed that when we eat earthly food, it is simply absorbed into our bodies to do its nutritional work. In contrast, when we receive the eucharist, we are drawn into Christ's body. Through this sacrament, we come to live in union with him. Of course, this requires our serious participation, our earnest desire, a genuine movement of the heart. As one of the invitations to Communion expresses, we must always, 'feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.'

An authentic Christian life is spiritually hungry. It is to want Christ and his life in you more and more. Living as those who are fed by Jesus Christ is the focus of our reading from the letter to the Ephesians. It tells of how we are called to live in Christ, live as part of the Body of Christ, the Church. The gifts and graces that Christ gives to each one of us are to help shape our Christian community life, our relationships with our brothers and sisters. We are urged to live lives that are worthy of our calling. We are to bear with one another in love; we are to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We are to speak the truth in love. All this leads to maturity in our life of faith. We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ himself.

As we feed on Jesus Christ, the bread of life, with our hearts fully in tune with what we are receiving, we are more and more being built up in the love of God in Christ. That love enables us to recognize Christ everywhere, in every life situation and person; we begin to see the world as he sees it and want to play our part in its healing and transformation.

With Jesus as our bread for living, our restless souls find repose, our hungry hearts are satisfied, and how ever many years we are granted on this earth, we can live a full life, not just half a life. And as it is the *risen* Lord that we feed on, we can also look forward with confidence to sharing his resurrection life in all its fullness.

1. Wisdom 2: 6 – 9; 1 Corinthians 15: 32 (with quote from Isaiah 22: 13)